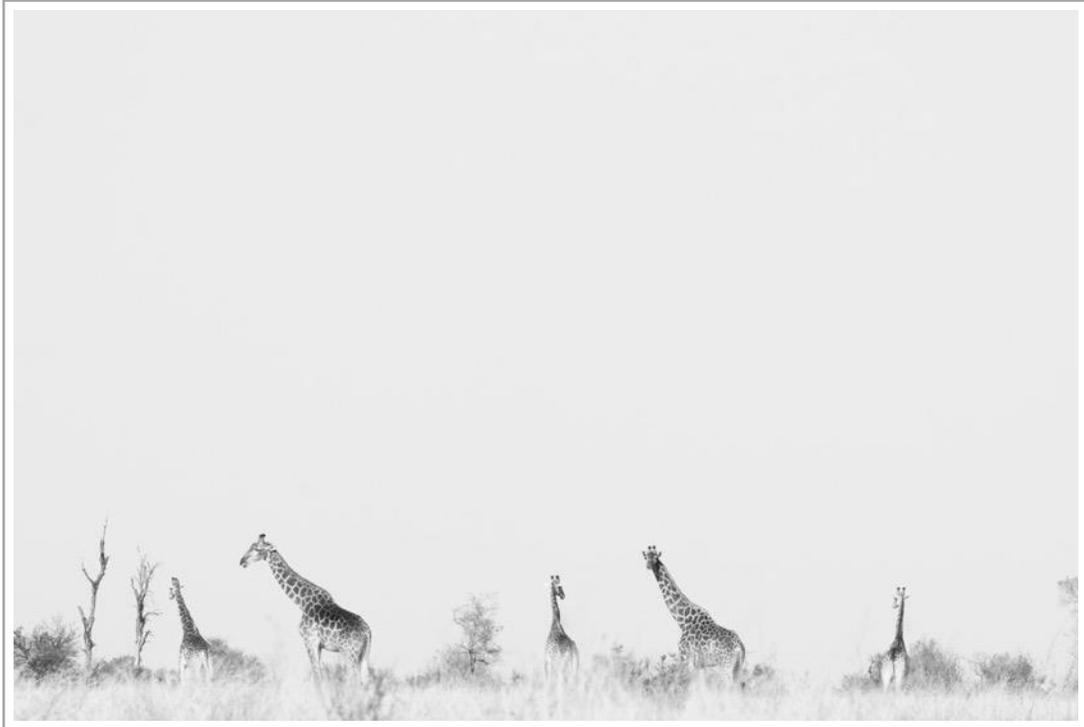


Singita



A tower of giraffe – Photo by Matt Holland

WILDLIFE JOURNAL
SINGITA KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA
For the month of August, Two Thousand and Twenty-Five

Temperature

Average minimum: 15.4°C (59.7°F)
Minimum recorded: 11.0°C (51.8°F)
Average maximum: 30.0°C (86.0°F)
Maximum recorded: 40.0°C (104.0°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 4 mm
Season to date: 448 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sept)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06h10
Sunset: 17h35

August in the Lowveld brings with it a beautiful contrast - crisp, often foggy mornings give way to warm, almost summery afternoons. The early mist rolls in as warm, moisture-rich air drifts westward over the Lebombo Mountains from the Indian Ocean, just beyond our neighbouring country, Mozambique. August is typically known for its dry winds, and we are grateful for them this year as the rising daytime temperatures have felt all the more intense. To cope, elephants and other animals have been wallowing in the cool mud with increasing frequency, coating themselves in protective layers. Dragonflies and bees buzz busily around the newly blooming blue waterlilies, and as dusk settles in, the soft glow of a few early fireflies begins to dance across the night sky. The bush is stirring with the promise of spring.

A Sightings Snapshot for August follows:

Lions

- The Chava Pride has truly taken centre stage this month, and it's easy to see why. With seven strong and experienced lionesses, two curious sub-adults, and an energetic bundle of 12 playful cubs, they've become a constant source of fascination and entertainment. The cubs, full of mischief and energy, are often seen tumbling over each other in mock battles, climbing small trees with surprising agility, or perfecting their stalking skills by pouncing on unsuspecting siblings. When not squabbling over the best position at the teat, they keep themselves, and us, busy with their antics. On several occasions this month, they've been spotted diving headfirst into the remains of a giraffe carcass, emerging almost unrecognizable, caked in blood and mud. It's a messy affair, but a necessary part of life in the wild - an early education in survival for these young lions.
- As per usual, the Sonop males arrived on the scene the next day. Two brothers devoured what was left of the giraffe while the third kept a close eye on a particular female. He stayed just far enough away that her large paw was out of reach of swatting at his face, and close enough that if she decided it was time, he was there to copulate.
- The Shish Pride has been seen intermittently throughout the month, with most sightings showing them either on the move with full bellies or resting in the shade of a tall leadwood tree. Two of the lionesses are still accompanied by the "short-maned" male, who has yet to be officially named for identification purposes. While we haven't observed any mating this month, it seems to be only a matter of time. The four sub-adult males are beginning to resemble their fathers in stature, with their muscles filling out and the first signs of manes starting to appear.
- The full complement of the Mananga Pride has only been seen twice this month. Early on, they were spotted feeding on a giraffe bull over the course of a few days before presumably being chased off by the Sonop males. Later, they appeared along our western boundary and have most likely been spending their time along the N'wanetsi River, west of our concession.
- Towards the end of the month, a very fortunate guide spotted a Chava lioness carrying a brand-new cub in her mouth, with two more trailing behind. She tucked them away in a thicket not far from where previous litters had been denning last year.

Leopards

- Dumbana's young female is maturing quickly. On several occasions this month, we followed her along the N'wanetsi River as she sawed and sprayed urine on nearly every guarri bush and large leadwood tree she passed. She, too, had her nose buried in a few bushes, seemingly analysing the scents left behind by other leopards in the area. Now over two years old, it's possible the instinct to raise her own cubs is beginning to surface.
- After a month-long disappearance—last seen at the end of June—the Zamani male has finally reappeared. A closer look at the locations and times of his sightings suggests that he holds quite a large territory, stretching from the northwest around Gudzane Dam all the way south to where the N'wanetsi River enters our concession. This area consists of large blocks of lush grassland and no roads, in which he can spend days at a time before needing to continue his territorial patrol.
- Due to the dispersal of our beloved Kalanga and his brother (from a previous Dumbana female litter), new males have begun moving into the now-vacant territories. For the time being, they remain quite shy around our vehicles, but with patience, we're confident they'll grow more relaxed as they come to realize we pose no threat. This month alone, we encountered three different males, each with a carcass stashed in a tree.
- The Lebombo male continues to reign over the granophyre ridge and the confluence of the N'wanetsi and Sweni Rivers. Even when he's not seen lounging in the tall phragmites grass along the riverbanks,

his presence is often revealed by the occasional alarm bark of a bushbuck or nyala echoing through the bush.

African wild dogs

- A pack of at least five adult wild dogs, accompanied by a blur of brand-new pups—moving far too fast to count—was spotted at the end of the month on the eastern side of our concession, in the granophyres. Judging by the size of the pups, it's likely the pack had been denning nearby and was in the process of relocating to a new site. This is a common behaviour among African wild dogs, helping to reduce the build-up of parasites in the natal den and minimizing the risk of detection by predators, which could pose a serious threat to the vulnerable pups.

Elephants

- A striking female elephant with unusually long tusks recently moved through our concession, capturing everyone's attention. One morning, to our delight, a tiny newborn calf wobbled out from beneath a large female in between a small herd near Gudzane Dam. Still unsteady on its feet, guests watched in awe as the little one clumsily tried to figure out its trunk, an endearing struggle with far too many muscles for such a new life to control just yet.

Spotted hyenas

- Spotted hyena activity in our concession has mostly involved lone individuals moving through the bush, noses lifted to the wind or steadily pacing along dirt roads at dawn and dusk. However, the large clan around the Ostrich Link open area continues to provide some wonderful moments. Recently, a few curious sub-adults have been allowed to join their mothers or older siblings on evening excursions.

Buffalos

- As the dry season intensifies and water sources become increasingly scarce, the buffalo are starting to lose condition. Instinctively, they begin to gather in larger herds, sometimes numbering from 100 to over 1 000, as they roam vast areas in search of food and water. This shift in behaviour means their movements have become more unpredictable, which explains why our recent buffalo sightings have been fewer than in previous months.

Plains game

- Game viewing has been exceptional this August, with large congregations of zebra and wildebeest appearing around nearly every corner. The open plains and riverine areas seem to be teeming with life. Along the N'wanetsi River, it feels as though every waterbuck in Kruger has gathered—taking full advantage of the remaining water and last green grass. Baboons have been particularly active, feasting on the blooming knobthorn flowers high in the trees, while the ever-present impalas methodically browse what's left of the green vegetation, making the most of the last remnants of winter growth. The abundance and diversity of general game have made for consistently rewarding sightings throughout the month.

Rare animals and other sightings

- This month brought an exciting array of rare and unusual sightings. Most notably, a Temminck's ground pangolin was spotted—the first one recorded in the area since 2016, making it an extraordinary highlight.
- A young honey badger also made a brief but bold appearance, delighting guests with its fearless energy.

- To top it off, a pair of side-striped jackals were seen at dusk, offering a rare glimpse of these elusive nocturnal canids as they moved through the grassland.

Birds

- This month, we've been seeing an obvious number of juvenile eagles in the area. Most birds of prey lay their eggs in the winter, so by early spring, the young have fledged and are beginning to hunt on their own. These juveniles are still learning, often seen practicing short flights, awkwardly attempting to catch prey, and generally figuring out what it takes to survive without their parents. It's a key stage in their development and one that offers a clear look at how these predators transition into capable adults.
- The common moorhen, once not so common on our concession, can now be seen along most rivers and in the remaining pans that still hold water. Some are accompanied by chicks as they forage, feeding on everything from aquatic plants to molluscs, tadpoles, and carrion.
- With spring just around the corner, the bush is coming alive with birdsong. The calls are growing more frequent and vibrant each morning, a sure sign of the seasonal shift. Among the more distinctive voices are the greater honeyguide, orange-breasted bushshrike, and brown-hooded kingfisher—each with its own unmistakable sound that carries through the trees. These early vocalizations hint at the breeding season ahead and bring a renewed energy to the landscape.

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



As a guide in the heart of Kruger National Park's Singita Lebombo and Sweni concession, I've spent countless days tracing the N'wanetsi River's winding path through this 37 000-acre paradise. Framed by rugged granophyre ridges and the towering Lebombo Mountains, this river isn't just water, it is the lifeblood of a vibrant web of ecosystems, teeming with creatures great and small. From the tiniest microbes to the fiercest predators, every inch of the N'wanetsi hums with life, and it's my privilege to witness it daily.

Under the river's surface, invisible armies of bacteria and diatoms churn away, breaking down organic debris and fuelling the aquatic food chain. These unseen workers support a cast of fish, sleek African sharptooth catfish, darting yellowfish, and the ever present red-breasted tilapia, that glide through the clear pools. Along the banks, lush greenery like reeds, water lilies, and ancient trees creates a thriving corridor. At spots where the river widens, water lilies paint the surface with bursts of colour, anchoring the soil and sheltering frogs, insects, and more.

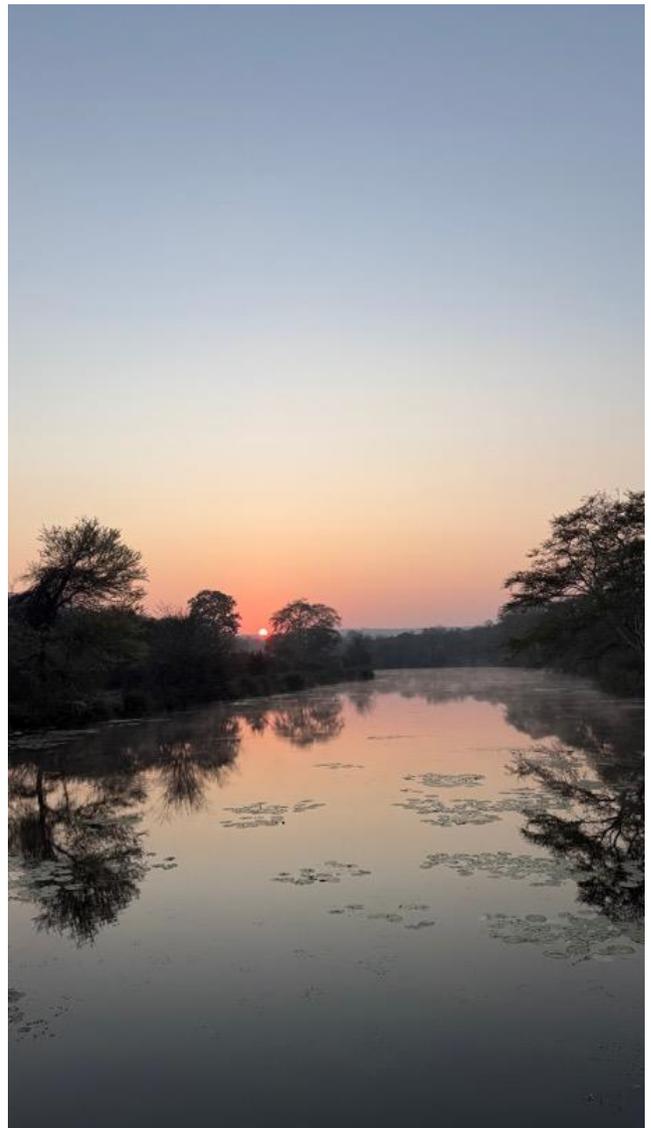
The birdlife here is a spectacle. As I lead guests along the river, we spot African hawk-eagles and tawny eagles perched high on euphorbia branches and on the Lebombo ridges, scanning for movement. The shy lesser moorhen skulks in the reeds, while flashes of lilac-breasted rollers and malachite kingfishers add colour to the scene. Their calls, sharp whistles and soft warbles fill the air, especially in the dry season when the N'wanetsi becomes a magnet for wildlife across the basalt plains.

The river draws the big guns too. Elephants lumber through the shallows, spraying water as they move toward the Central Depression. Crocodiles, eyes like polished stones, patrol from quiet pools to drainage lines. Leopards, ghosts of the thickets, slip through the riverine cover, while lion prides occupy the open spaces, chasing zebra or impala herds, or more recently the giraffe. After heavy rains the river's flow holds strong, pulling in grazers from the parched west, turning the landscape into a living theatre.

The N'wanetsi's ecosystems are shaped by the land itself. The ridges and basalt plains guide animal movements, creating pathways and boundaries that make every game drive unpredictable. Quite a few different ecozones collide here, crafting a biodiversity hotspot that never ceases to amaze.

I watch guests gasp at hippos lazing in the water or fish eagles diving for prey - all part of this ancient, interconnected dance.

But this paradise isn't without threats. Conservation efforts, from habitat protection to local partnerships and the Singita Lowveld Trust, are vital to keeping this place whole. For me, guiding along the N'wanetsi is more than a job, it's a front-row seat to nature's masterpiece, where every fish, bird, and mammal tells a story of survival and connection, urging us to protect this wild, beating heart.



Spend enough time on safari with Singita and you will notice that animals have a language all their own. Sometimes it's subtle, like the flick of a tail or an ear. Other times, it's impossible to miss. One of the most intriguing and often amusing behaviours you might see on drive is the Flehmen grimace. At first glance, it looks like the animal is pulling a funny face, curling back its upper lip, wrinkling its nose and lifting its head as if it just smelled something unpleasant. But behind this comical expression lies an incredible sensory tool that gives animals an edge in the wild.



Lion performing Flehmen grimace

The Flehmen grimace is all about information gathering. When a male lion pauses mid-trail and makes that face after sniffing a patch of ground, or when a zebra stops to investigate the scent of another, they're not just being dramatic. They are processing chemical signals, messages left behind by other animals. These signals, known as pheromones, tell a story. They reveal who passed through, whether they were male or female, young



or mature, healthy or stressed, and even if a female is ready to mate. It is a silent communication network layered across the bush, and the Flehmen response is the key that unlocks it.

The reason animals make this strange face is because of a remarkable sensory structure called the vomeronasal organ, also known as Jacobson's organ. Located in the roof of the mouth or the nasal cavity, depending on the species. Its job is specifically to detect pheromones. While the nose handles everyday scents like food or the smell of rain, this organ is tuned to chemical cues that are heavier and more complex. When a stallion lifts his lip or a leopard pauses to grimace at a scent mark, they're effectively opening a direct channel to this organ, drawing the chemical molecules in and sending the information straight to the brain's accessory olfactory system.

The accessory olfactory system is a specialized part of the brain dedicated to processing these pheromone signals. Unlike the main olfactory system, which interprets familiar smells, this pathway is designed to handle subtle, socially important information. It begins in the vomeronasal organ and feeds directly into the accessory olfactory bulb, a cluster of neurons that act like a translator for chemical messages. From there, signals travel to deeper parts of the brain linked to instinct and emotion, influencing behaviours such as mating, aggression, and even parental care. It's an ancient and highly efficient system, allowing animals to make decisions in the blink of an eye based on chemical cues we humans can't even detect.

For the animal, this momentary pause is like checking an unseen noticeboard. A male cheetah may discover that a rival passed through earlier that morning. A bull elephant could confirm if a female is in oestrus and ready to breed. Even prey animals use this information, often assessing the scent of others in their herd to understand stress levels or health conditions. It is a behaviour that can look a little humorous to us, but it plays a serious role in social bonding, reproduction and territory management.

Out here, where so much of life is written in scents and tracks, the Flehmen grimace is a reminder that the bush is full of messages we can't always see or hear. Next time you're on drive and see a lion, zebra or even a giraffe pull back its lip and freeze for a moment, you will know that it's not being playful or aggressive it's reading a chemical story only it can understand.



Lion performing the Flehmen grimace



Leopard smelling the air

August Gallery



Yellow-billed stork – Photo by Monika Malewski



Lioness – Photo by Matt Holland

Lebombo male – Photo by Monika Malewski





Sonop and Chava lioness – Photo by Monika Malewski

Cape buffalo – Photo by Matt Holland



Chava lioness – Photo by Matt Holland





Flap-neck chameleon – Photo by Monika Malewski
Kori bustard – Photo by Monika Malewski

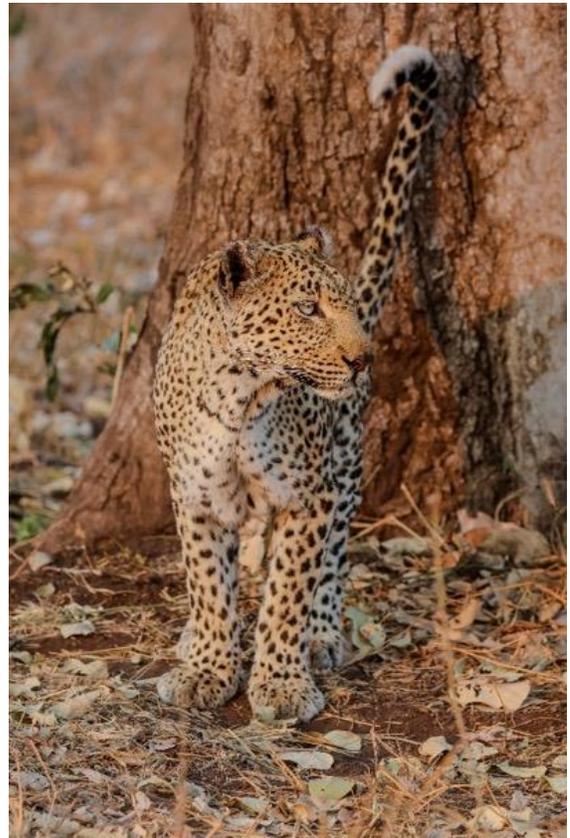




Chava pride cubs – Photo by Monika Malewski

Bushbuck – Photo by Monika Malewski

Nhlanguleni female – Photo by Matt Holland





Chava pride feeding – Photo by Matt Holland



Southern red-billed hornbill – Photo by Monika Malewski



Chava Pride feeding – Photo by Monika Malewski



Dumbana young female – Photo by Monika Malewski
Side-striped Jackal – Photo by Monika Malewski

