

Singita



Sonop male crossing the N'wanetsi River – Photo by Monika Malewski

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

Temperature

Average minimum: 18°C (65°F)
Minimum recorded: 14°C (57°F)
Average maximum: 31°C (87°F)
Maximum recorded: 40°C (104°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 8 mm
Season to date: 456 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sept)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05h35
Sunset: 17h45

September has been a month of wild swings out here in the bush! Some days have been scorching, pushing up to 40°C (104°F), while others have surprised us with chilly gusting winds - making it hard to believe it's the same time of year. The dry season is in full swing now, and as water becomes scarce, most of the wildlife has gathered along the N'wanetsi River, making for some incredible sightings. We have witnessed a few dramatic stand-offs between lions, each encounter reminding us just how raw and real life is out here. The skies have

put on a show too—every sunrise and sunset painted in rich auburn and orange tones. To top it off, a few of the migratory birds have returned, bringing with them the first whispers of the coming summer.

A Sightings Snapshot for September follows:

Lions

- The Mananga Pride has settled into an area surrounding a reliable water source that persists even through the driest months. Their recent success in hunting yielded multiple impalas and a few other unidentified meals. Each sighting we had of them revealed well-fed lions, resting lazily in the shade, panting as they digested their latest kill. However, this peaceful period was interrupted when the Sonop males ventured further south of their established territory and potentially encountered the pride. Since that moment, we have observed only two or three individuals, most notably the adult females, who appear to be reaching sexual maturity or are on the brink of oestrus. This could be a tactical move on the part of the pride, particularly if they are still nursing vulnerable cubs at risk of infanticide by unrelated males. We suspect that the pride has retreated west of our concession, and we remain hopeful they will return in the near future.
- Historically, during the dry season, the Shish Pride migrates into the south of our concession, capitalising on the high concentrations of prey around the N’wanetsi River. This year, their movements have followed a similar pattern. At the start of the month, they were spotted traversing the scenic river bend between Ostrich-link Fly Camp and Dave’s Crossing—an area rich in biodiversity, with a large sycamore fig tree, a mature natal mahogany, and a variety of striking riparian vegetation. This region also serves as the core territory of the Dumbana female leopard, and one morning we observed her dragging a fresh impala carcass toward a thicket by the river. Coincidentally, the Shish Pride was moving northward at the time, and they swiftly chased the leopard off her kill. The impala didn’t last long among the nine members of the pride, and the intense growling and squabbling over the carcass attracted the attention of the “short-maned” male, who has been exploring the area for the past few months. He trailed the pride for several days, and surprisingly, they seemed to grow accustomed to his presence. That was until one night, when we spent some time with the male as he rested after a hearty meal, while the Shish Pride remained less than 50 metres away. As dusk fell, the pride moved toward the river to drink after a scorching day of 41°C (104°F). The male followed closely behind. Unaware of what would unfold that evening, we left to return to the lodge for dinner.
- It’s likely that the Sonop males, a coalition of three dominant lions, heard the “short-maned” male roaring as he confidently established his presence, attempting to assert his dominance over the Shish Pride. The Sonop males, who have been expanding their range in recent months, were within earshot and responded instinctively. Upon examining the tracks and signs the following morning, it became evident that a confrontation had occurred. The “short-maned” male now bears a fresh set of claw marks on his rump, but fortunately for him, it appears he escaped with only this injury before fleeing the scene. Meanwhile, the Shish Pride, skilled in avoiding unrelated males, retreated into the mountains and has not been seen since. The following day, we found what we believe to be their tracks, leading from the lodge grounds and into the Kruger National Park.
- To stir things up once again, the Sonop males paid a visit to the Shish territory at the end of the month. After many days without seeing the pride, they had briefly come into our concession long enough for us to find them feeding on a wildebeest bull. The next day only three members were seen, all looking incredibly unsettled and staring in the direction of the Sonop males. Realising that the Shish Pride was still not accepting their advances, the two brothers turned and hastily headed back west to their territory.

Leopards

- At the beginning of the month, the Dumbana female was observed racing across the road with the shy male in hot pursuit behind her. He has recently established himself in the area west of the N'wanetsi River, just north of the lodges. Their behaviour suggested that she may be coming into oestrus again, and he appeared to be responding to her olfactory cues. Her most recent litter is now approaching two years of age and are largely independent. We haven't seen her young male since early last month—typical behaviour for a dispersing young leopard. Her daughter, however, has remained within her mother's territory, frequenting the last remaining water sources, particularly around Xinenene Poort—a stunning geological formation of volcanic rock that forms a permanent water feature.
- On one occasion, we found the young female near a kudu carcass, thanks to a prominent drag mark across the road, flanked by her petite paw prints. The size of the carcass suggested she had likely scavenged it, as it was far too heavy for her to hoist into a tree. Instead, she had dragged it into a nearby thicket along the Xinenene drainage line for concealment.
- Dumbana's son has been more elusive this month, spending most of his time on the western half of his mother's territory.
- As the dry season intensifies, antelope are rapidly losing condition, and the predators are taking full advantage. Earlier this month, we encountered the old Nhlangueni female resting in the shade of an apple-leaf tree. She had hoisted the remains of a nyala into the lower branches. With a full belly, she panted heavily in the heat before rising and making her way to a nearby leadwood tree. With a graceful leap, she ascended to a dead branch, pausing to scan her surroundings. Satisfied, she climbed a little higher and settled on a horizontal limb, perfectly contoured to cradle her head while allowing her distended belly to hang comfortably to the side. Her eyes slowly closed as she drifted into a deep sleep.
- The Lebombo male has shown no signs of slowing down either. Nearly every sighting of him reveals a full belly and half-lidded eyes, heavy with the lethargy of recent meals. Like the others, he is making the most of this season of opportunity. After a few days absence, we found him with a female, on the banks of the N'wanetsi River, with whom he has been mating for the last few days. She is a female we see from time to time, but has yet to be habituated to our vehicles. This shows just how vast and untouched the Kruger National Park is, that some animals can live their whole life without seeing a single vehicle.

African wild dogs

- A pack of three, two males and one female, that were denning on our concession at the end of last month are still in the area. They have since relocated the den-site further north along the granophyre ridge, near an old hyena den. The new location is a burrow beneath a rocky outcrop, offering excellent shelter from the elements as well as protection from larger mammals that could pose a threat to the pups.
- By mid-month, sightings of the pack became more frequent, though now occurring further west of their original territory. This shift may indicate that the pups have left their den-site. There are currently five playful pups, and the adults are diligently working to meet the growing nutritional needs of their young. One morning, we observed the pack taking down an impala ram, with the pups eagerly devouring as much as their small bellies could manage. Amid the long dry grass, all that could be seen were their comically large ears and the distinctive white tufts at the tips of their tails.

Elephants

- Two very fortunate guides and their guests had the rare privilege of witnessing the precious moments of a brand-new elephant calf just after its birth. For nearly an hour, the tiny calf struggled to find its footing. Born near the river's edge, its first moments were interrupted when a large bull elephant approached, drawn by the commotion, and mounted the mother. In the process, the newborn calf was inadvertently pushed into the water! Without hesitation, the herd sprang into action. In a remarkable

display of teamwork and ingenuity, they pulled reeds from the riverbank and spread them over the slippery mud. After what seemed like an eternity, the calf finally managed to scramble out of the water, where it was lovingly comforted by its mother and several other females in the herd.

- The elephants are effectively thinning out the already sparse bushveld, now targeting the remaining leafless branches of the raisin bushes. They strip the cambium layer from these branches with the same methodical precision as one would eat corn on the cob. The last remaining pans have transformed into mud wallows, and every afternoon, we observe at least four or more herds scattered along the N'wanetsi River.

Spotted hyenas

- At the beginning of the month, a large hyena clan, at least twelve individuals, including several cubs, found themselves in the right place at the right time. It was a warm late afternoon, just after sunset, when a lone wild dog launched an attack on an unsuspecting impala ewe. The sound of rocks tumbling beneath the chase alerted the nearby hyenas, and within less than a minute, they had rushed in. The wild dog was swiftly driven off, and the clan erupted into a chorus of eerie whoops and guttural growls. Snarling and shoving, they lunged at the carcass, each one competing for a bite as they tugged and twisted at the fresh meat in a frenzied scramble.

Buffalos

- At this time of year, resources within Kruger National Park become increasingly scarce, which takes a toll on the buffalo population. Weakened individuals, in search of better protection, often band together in larger herds for safety. These herds, sometimes reaching up to 2 000 members, must cover vast distances to meet their nutritional needs. This month, buffalo sightings have been relatively rare. A number of dagga boys have been roaming near the northern boundary, while a large herd of approximately 700 spent a week in and around the Gudzane Dam area, likely drawn by the limited but available water and grazing.

Plains game

- September has delivered exceptional plains game sightings across Singita Kruger National Park. In the central depression, we've been treated to the rare spectacle of large giraffe groups—sometimes up to 20 individuals—roaming together across the open terrain. The impala ewes are now showing clear signs of pregnancy, their growing bellies a sure indication that the lambing season is near. Wildebeest numbers have also swelled noticeably, forming larger herds than we've seen in recent years. Much of the game has concentrated along the N'wanetsi River in the east and around Gudzane Dam in the west, drawn by the last remaining water sources as the dry season deepens.

Rare animals and other sightings

- This month, we've been fortunate to spot several rare species, including a serval, a white-tailed mongoose, and a sable antelope. These animals are considered rare in this area due to a combination of factors, including their specific habitat requirements and low population densities. The serval, with its preference for dense, tall grasslands and wetlands, is elusive, often avoiding human activity. The white-tailed mongoose, a nocturnal and solitary creature, is shy and tends to stay hidden in dense scrub or woodland. As for the sable antelope, its rarity in this region is due to historical hunting pressures and habitat loss, making it a sought-after but elusive sighting. Their presence in the park is a testament to the rich biodiversity and ongoing conservation efforts.
- Incredibly, we've recorded a second pangolin sighting in just six weeks—an exciting addition to our September observations. Judging by its size, location, and the condition of its scales, we're confident this is a different individual from the first. Pangolins are among the rarest and most secretive mammals in Africa, and with no definitive data on their population within Kruger National Park, every sighting is a

remarkable event. These elusive, nocturnal creatures are rarely encountered, making two sightings in such a short time both thrilling and deeply encouraging.

Birds

- As the season shifts, several migrant species have begun to return. The resident pale morph Wahlberg's eagle was spotted at its nest early in the month, a welcome sign of its seasonal presence. The distinctive call of the Klaas's cuckoo—its "meitjie, meitjie" (Afrikaans onomatopoeia) has also been heard echoing through the landscape. On the 19th, the first flock of European bee-eaters was observed flying just north of the lodge, signalling the arrival of the migratory wave. At Dave's Crossing, a lesser moorhen was sighted. While predominantly an intra-African migrant, some lesser moorhens do overwinter in suitable habitats within southern Africa, though they remain elusive and often prefer to stay hidden in dense cover.

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



Every once in a while, the African bush rewards our quiet patience with a sighting so rare and extraordinary that even the most seasoned guides are left breathless. One such treasure is the Temminck's ground pangolin, a shy, nocturnal creature so elusive that many wildlife professionals can go decades without encountering one. Yet when we do, it becomes the story of the season.

The Temminck's ground pangolin (*Smutsia temminckii*) is one of four pangolin species found in Africa, and the only one adapted to terrestrial life in the savannas and woodlands of southern and eastern Africa. Covered head to tail in overlapping keratin scales, akin to a walking pinecone, it looks more like a creature from myth than reality. Weighing between 5 and 15 kilograms, this nocturnal mammal moves with a curious, almost comical gait, balancing on its hind legs and tail while foraging. It uses its long, sticky tongue, sometimes longer than its body, to probe termite mounds and ant nests, consuming thousands of insects in a single night. Though often mistaken for reptiles due to their scaly armour, pangolins are mammals, more closely related to carnivores like cats and dogs than to any lizard.

Despite its secretive habits, the Temminck's pangolin plays a vital ecological role. As an insectivore, it helps regulate ant and termite populations, which can otherwise cause significant damage to trees and soil structure. By burrowing into termite mounds, pangolins also assist in aerating the soil, promoting nutrient cycling and creating shelter opportunities for other species like mongooses and warthogs. In essence, pangolins are quiet custodians of the ecosystem, performing crucial services that support the health of the savanna without ever drawing attention to themselves.

To see a Temminck's ground pangolin in the wild is to witness one of Africa's greatest natural marvels. They are solitary, secretive, and mostly nocturnal, spending daylight hours tucked away in burrows or termite mounds. Their camouflage and discreet behaviour make them nearly invisible to the untrained eye. When one does emerge from the darkness and shuffles across a road or through the undergrowth, the entire tone of a game drive changes. Guests fall silent. Radios crackle with astonishment. Cameras click, but only after a moment of awe-struck stillness. These sightings are not just rare; they are profoundly moving, often referred to as "lifetime moments" by guests and guides alike. Adding to their mystique is the unfortunate fact that pangolins are among the most trafficked mammals in the world, hunted for their scales and meat. As such, every sighting here at Singita is also a powerful reminder of our conservation responsibilities.

In a landscape teeming with iconic wildlife, from elephants to lions, it's easy to overlook the quiet creatures of the night. But the Temminck's ground pangolin reminds us that some of the greatest wonders of the bush are not loud or large, but subtle, secret, and sacred. Here at Singita Kruger National Park, we have been privileged to share two sightings in the last two months of these rare animals with guests who truly appreciate the magic of the untamed. Should you ever be lucky enough to glimpse one, know that you have witnessed something truly special, one of the last, living legends of Africa.

Out here in the south-eastern corner of Kruger, as winter finally loosens its dry grip, something quiet but remarkable is taking place among the impala herds. The change is subtle at first, a bit more fullness in the flanks, a heaviness to the gait, ewes standing a little longer in the shade. But soon, it's unmistakable: our impala ewes are showing! Their bellies are beginning to swell, and with each passing week, it becomes more obvious, the next generation of lambs is well on its way. Every guide here at Singita has started pointing it out to guests on morning drives: "See how round she's getting? She'll be a mother by the start of the rains." And that's usually when someone asks the question, the same one I asked years ago when I was still learning the rhythms of this place:

"Is it true impalas can delay giving birth until after the first rains?"

It's a story that's floated around bush camps and guide circles for decades. The idea that impala ewes can somehow hold onto their pregnancies a little longer, waiting until the first drops of summer rain before releasing their lambs into a greener, safer world. It's a romantic notion. Clever little impala moms, in tune with the weather, delaying labour until conditions are just right. I've heard it repeated confidently around many a campfire.

But here's the thing: it's not true.

Biologically, it's impossible. Impalas, like most antelope, have a fairly fixed gestation period, roughly six and a half months. Once fertilisation occurs (typically during the May rut), the clock starts ticking. There's no pause button, no way for the ewe to hold the foetus in stasis while she waits for thunderclouds to roll in.

So where did the story come from? It likely started with observations — many calves do seem to appear right after the first rains. The veld goes from dust to green almost overnight, and soon after, the bush is alive with wobbly-legged lambs. To early observers, it looked like the impalas were timing birth with the weather. But the truth lies not in delayed birth — it lies in synchronised conception. Impala rams go into full rut during late autumn (usually May), and after a chaotic few weeks of roaring, chasing, and posturing, mating occurs across a short window. Ewes come into oestrus in waves, often within days of one another. This means most of them conceive around the same time — and thus, most of them give birth around the same time, about 200 days later.

Do the rains align with that birthing window? Sometimes, yes. Sometimes, they don't. But the lambs come anyway. This tight lambing period is one of nature's oldest tricks. By dropping dozens or even hundreds of calves within days of each other, impalas create a predator swamping effect — more babies than predators can eat. Lions, leopards, hyenas, wild dogs, jackals — they can only take so many. It gives more calves a chance to survive their first, most vulnerable weeks. And yes, it helps if there's food around — which is why the rut is cleverly timed for the dry season, anticipating that births will occur as the first rains green the landscape in November or early December. That's what we're seeing now. In mid-September, those ewes are well into their third trimester. The baby bumps are showing. We're seeing them graze more selectively, lie down more often in the heat, and stay closer to thicker cover.

I often find myself quietly rooting for them — these elegant, underestimated antelope who must be mothers, sentinels, and survivors all at once. If all goes well, in just under two months, the lambs will come — sometimes awkward and teetering, sometimes born during a downpour, other times in a dusty clearing before the rains even arrive.

There's something valuable in letting go of these old bush myths — even the charming ones. Because when we do, we're left with something even more impressive than magic: biology, evolution, and timing so finely tuned

that it can look like magic. The impala does not need to delay birth. She simply relies on thousands of generations of perfectly calibrated instinct to bring her lamb into the world right when it's most likely to survive. As guides, we have the privilege, and responsibility, to share those truths. Because the real story, the honest one, is still filled with wonder.

So next time you're out here with us, and we point out a pregnant impala, now you'll know the real story. No weather-based wizardry, just nature, doing exactly what it was always meant to do.



September Gallery



White-backed, lappet-faced, white-headed and Cape vulture – Photo by Monika Malewski

Dumbana's young female – Photo by Monika Malewski



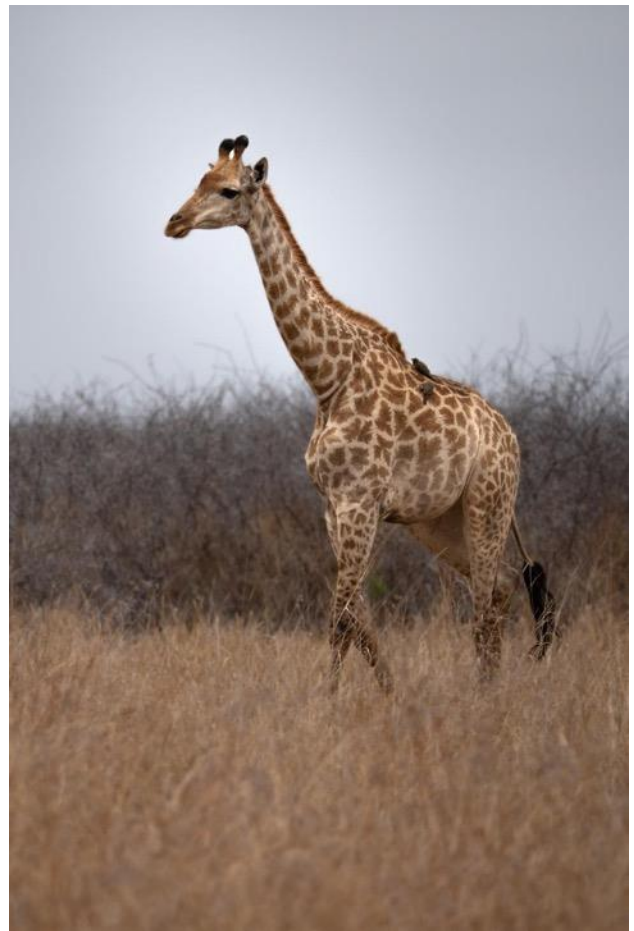


Blood moon & Lunar Eclipse on 7 September – Photo by Monika Malewski

Combretum mossambicense – Photo by Brian Rode



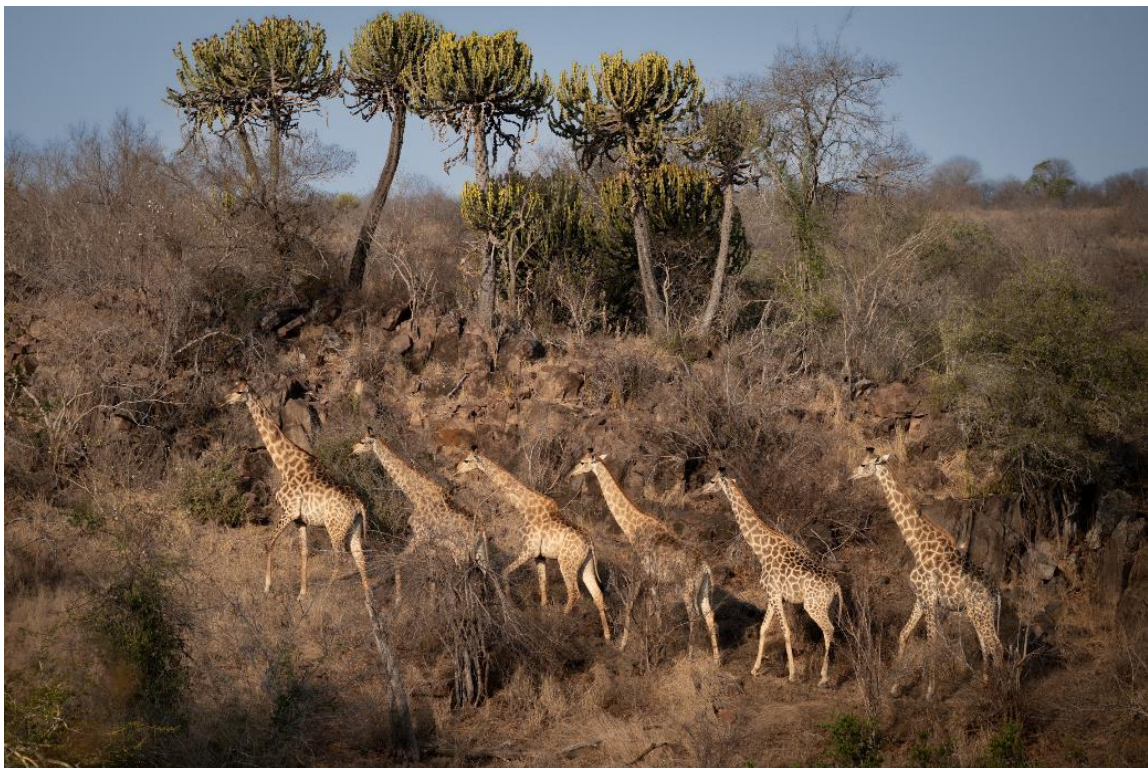
Giraffe - Photo by Monika Malewski





Mananga lioness – Photo by Monika Malewsk

Journey of Giraffe – Photo by Monika Malewski





Post-moult *Parabuthus* sp. – Photo by Brian Rode



Horned-baboon spider – Photo by Brian Rode

Spotted hyena cubs – Photo by Monika Malewski





Mananga lioness – Photo by Monika Malewski

Elephants below Lebombo – Photo by Chantelle Rode





Kudu bull – Photo by Monika Malewski

Shish lionesses – Photo by Monika Malewski





Hippopotamus – Photo by Monika Malewski

Small-spotted genet – Photo by Monika Malewski

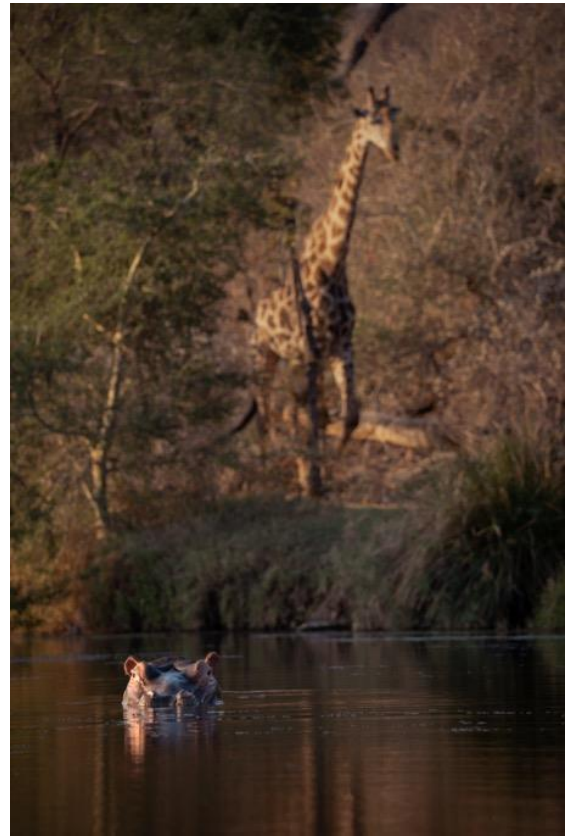


Spotted hyena – Photo by Monika Malewski





Peek-a-boo – Photo by Monika Malewski



A scene at the weir – Photo by Monika Malewski

Family of elephants – Photo by Monika Malewski



Compiled by Monika Malewski