

Singita



Photo by Rudi Hulshoff

WILDLIFE JOURNAL SINGITA KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA For January, Two Thousand and Twenty-three

Temperature

Average minimum: 21°C (69.8°F)
Minimum recorded: 18°C (64.4°F)
Average maximum: 31°C (88.7°F)
Maximum recorded: 36°C (96.8°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 30 mm
Season to date: 151.5 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:26
Sunset: 18:43

The month of January saw very little rain arrive in the south with most of the rain falling in the north. A few of the watering holes and mud wallows in the central depression are still full from December rainfall but we are most certainly still in need of more for the N'wanetsi and Sweni Rivers to hold water through the year. More migratory bird species returned from their northern adventures, and marula trees have started fruiting. Pops of colours are seen throughout the concession with multiple trees and wild flowers in bloom.

A Sightings Snapshot for January follows:

Lions

- January started with immense excitement when a coalition of five males were found in the north along Nkayanini. These males have previously been seen on Mbatsane (our northern border) but this was the first time they had been located within the concession. They stayed for two days before making their way back north. Signs of their presence were found again one morning when a devoured buffalo carcass was located with multiple sets of male lion tracks around the carcass leading us to believe that these five males were the likely culprits.
- The larger portion of the Mananga Pride have, to a degree, vacated the north and central parts that they were commonly seen in before. They have spent the majority of their time to the west of the concession and were even seen all the way south along the H6 public road. Previously this prides movements centred around the presence of buffalo herds which have been frequenting the central depression and north thereof. We think their dispersal may have something to do with the incursion of the five males moving in from the north.
- The smaller portion of the Mananga Pride have been infrequently viewed with them spending the majority of the month west of the concession. They have been seen mostly along Park Road and once on a zebra kill in the clearings east of Gudzani Dam. One morning, however, surprised us all when the pride along with the Shishangaan males were found just north of a crossing that is very far south and east of where this pride normally occurs. We viewed the entire complement of the Mananga Pride one afternoon when the larger portion responded to calls from the smaller portion.
- The Shishangaan males are spending a lot of time with the smaller portion of the Mananga Pride and are not often seen on their own. This aging coalition are still holding firm for now and were even found one morning heading back north from an area that the two Trichardt males were found in. No signs of a confrontation were observed but it is still commendable that these males must have headed south initially to follow up on the Trichardt males who were vocalizing the evening before.
- Four sightings of the Shishangaan Pride were had in January with four lionesses being viewed on each occasion and all in close proximity to the lodges. It's thought that the pride moved further south and east, and potentially into Mozambique, due to the three large males that have been challenging the Trichardt males.
- The Trichardt males have kept a low profile and there were initial thoughts that the coalition had been pushed out. This was until one morning when the two males were found just east of the lodges, in excellent condition. The three nomadic males haven't been seen this month and so the pressure seems to be off the Trichardt males for the time being.
- The Maputo male has been seen on a few occasions in the central parts of the property, vocalizing and marking his former territory.

Leopards

- Two of the large male leopards that we view were named this month. One male, which holds territory from the sticky-thorns northwards to Double Crossing and then from Basalt and further west, was named the 'Pelajambu male' which roughly means 'where the sun sets' owing to this male's territory being in the west. The other male is a very relaxed individual who has been viewed on the concession for some time but was never named for recording purposes. This male's territory is large and stretches from west of the concession to as far east as Nyokene. He has been called the 'Monzo male', the Xitsonga word for leadwood tree as he has been seen resting in leadwood trees on a few occasions and has been sighted moving along Monzo Road.
- The Nhlangueni female is doing an incredible job at providing meals for her two cubs, and the trio were located on three separate kills throughout the month. The cubs are becoming more habituated to vehicles and are extremely relaxed when mom is around.
- The Dumbana young males are continuing to spend time within their natal area and are still often found along Ntsibitsane and Ostrich-link. The Dumbana 3:3 young male was seen more than his paler brother and he was even seen as far north as Ingwe/2-tegwaan where he spent a few days moving

along the Xinkelengane drainage before returning back south. The brothers were seen together one day where they lay in close proximity to each other around a small pan of water. Their mother was seen once this month and is looking very pregnant. She was seen exploring the ridge line to the north of Madagha crossing, potentially looking for a den-site.

- An unknown skittish female and her cub were seen on Park Road south of James. Tracks of these two have been seen on the concession and this was the first sighting of the pair.

Wild dogs

- Sightings of African wild dogs have continued to enthral both guides and guests throughout the month. We've enjoyed quality viewing of two different packs, a pack of nine, and eleven.
- Both packs have been sighted in very similar areas in the mountains east of the N'wanetsi River as well as in the open clearings around Ostrich Link.
- One morning, guides were able to follow the pack of nine for almost the entire morning around Ntsibitsane and Ostrich Link where they gave chase to multiple impala herds and were successful in bringing down two adult impalas.
- Some guides and their guests had the incredible opportunity to observe the collaring of one of the wild dogs from the pack of nine. This initiative is run by the Mpumalanga State Veterinarians and African wild dog specialists from the Endangered Wildlife Trust. African wild dogs are free roamers and move over incredible distances, and the packs that we have the opportunity of viewing also cross over into Mozambique. The satellite collar allows the research teams to keep track of the packs movements.

Spotted hyenas

- A number of spotted hyenas have been viewed around Ma-4-Pounds, Monzo, Ntsibitsane and Ostrich Link open area. They are often found in the small wallows, escaping the heat and enjoying the cooler water and mud.
- A clan of five were sighted following the pack of nine wild dogs and were quickly rebuffed when they tried to rob the pack of their two impala kills.

Elephants

- Many of the herds and bulls have moved further west to the granitic soils, where marula trees are more prevalent. These trees are now fruiting and its these fruits that the large pachyderms absolutely crave around this time of the year.
- Most sightings of breeding herds are in the central depression where a number of seasonal watering holes and mud wallows are found and it is around these wallows that the elephants can be found in the afternoons.
- A very memorable sighting of a true Kruger Tusker bull, with tusks stretching to just above the ground, was had one morning. He calmly strolled down one of the roads to a mud wallow before moving west to the edges of the concession. He must be one of the well-known tuskers in the park and photographs of him will be sent to the necessary personnel for identification purposes.

Buffalos

- We have enjoyed regular sightings of at least two large herds of buffalo all throughout the central and northern sections of the concession. The one herd numbers \pm 250 animals and the other is between 400 – 500 buffalos. The herds are often found in areas with multiple mud wallows where they can be observed rolling around and covering themselves in the dark coloured mud.
- A few buffalo bulls were sighted along the N'wanetsi River often around Xingwenyana and Dave's Crossing.

Plains game

- We have once again been spoilt with regular incredible sightings of giraffes all throughout the concession. All the wildebeest herds have multiple young calves with some late arrivals having been born in the latter parts of January. Dazzles of plains zebras are found in various parts of the concession with one very memorable sighting where over 150 zebras were seen together! Waterbuck are seen all along the N'wanetsi River and are found in large herds around Gudzani Dam.

Cheetahs

- The female cheetah and two sub-adults were spotted twice this month moving through the central depression. Over a year old now, the time is fast approaching where the two young males will have to fend for themselves.
- A single female cheetah was seen around Leadwood/Xinkelengane where she was observed chasing a family of warthogs before hunting and successfully killing a common duiker. Guests then watched a second female the following day chase and kill an impala lamb on Gudzani loop.

Rare animals and other sightings

- Serval were viewed four times this month including one very relaxed individual around N'wanetsi Big Bend with which guests were able to spend significant time.

Birds

- Blue-cheeked bee-eaters were sighted around Puffadder Pools.
- Southern carmine bee-eaters are being seen across the concession with most sightings around the Central Depression.
- A white-fronted bee-eater was sighted at Xingwenyana Crossing.
- A Eurasian hobby was sighted along Ntsibitsane.
- Amur falcons have been seen hawking termite alates in the grasslands.
- A dwarf bittern was seen in a marsh area around Double Crossing.

Some Bush Stories follow, as well as a January Gallery of images.

While out on safari one stands a good chance of coming across the lonely figure of a spotted hyena as it disappears into the night looking for its next meal. Hyenas by no means have the best reputation and this is partly due to various documentaries and the ever famous “Lion King” where they are portrayed as the evil villain. While they are prolific scavengers, they are also extremely successful hunters and it is their social structure and interactions which I find the most fascinating. Watching a clan of hyenas interact can be both interesting and quite comical at the same time, especially when you have the privilege of viewing such interactions take place between the cubs at a communal den-site. Den-sites offer an intimate view into spotted hyenas lives and it is often the cubs that steal the show, and so I thought I would delve a little into the general social structure of these amazing animals.

The spotted hyena is a gregarious species within which strong social groups (referred to as clans) are formed, consisting of a strict hierarchical system. Dominance within a clan is highly structured with rank being referred to as matrilineal rank, and acquisition of rank in hyena cubs referred to as matrilineal rank inheritance. Females are the more dominant of the two sexes where even the lowest ranking female outranks the highest-ranking male. As males almost always leave their natal clan, the submissive behaviour observed is thought to be due to the males taking up immediate subordinate roles while integrating into a new clan. Females, however, usually remain within their natal clan often forming several multi-generational matrilineal lines. I have often viewed adult males being slightly more active and research has shown that they move further distances than adult females, which is presumably in search of viable receptive females. The same goes for lower ranking females who tend to spend more time away from den-sites as a result of them needing to hunt/scavenge more due to kills being dominated by higher ranking females.



Cubs of both sexes take up rank directly below that of their mothers with rank among siblings of different ages being organized from oldest to youngest. Studies have found that rank inheritance among hyena cubs was not entirely driven by genetic heritability, as originally thought, but rather through maternal interventions. Adult female interventions are seen during aggressive cub behaviour directed towards their own offspring. Females also tend to intervene when individuals that are not their own offspring interfere with suckling or rest times, however this is only really observed with high-ranking females; lower ranking females avoid intervention. This

all aids in their offspring learning who within the clan they can/cannot dominate. Strong competitive as well as co-operative bonds are seen in hyena cubs and mainly between cubs of the same litter. Usually, dominance between litter mates is already established before they emerge from their den two to four weeks after birth. It is quite often the case then that when littermates emerge from their den, they are of different sex as the male would have taken up a subordinate rank directly below that of his sister. Same sex litters lead to extreme aggressive behaviour which often ends in the less dominant cub being killed. Cubs from around six months of age begin to challenge adult females who are of a lower rank than their mother and it is seen more often during agonistic coalition formations. Coalitionary formation and support is usually seen between hyenas of similar rank, individuals would therefore usually form coalitions with their own sibling littermates instead of with other non-sibling cubs. Coalitions are formed when cubs join together and express aggressive behaviour towards another individual who is not part of the coalition, these coalitions are also believed to aid in the cubs' learning of their maternal rank.

Although there is so much more to know about these animals, hopefully if you're lucky enough to find yourself at a den with this information in mind, it will help you appreciate these inquisitive and mischievous animals that much more. Time well spent at a den will certainly dispel any misconceptions of this species and change any negative outlook into a positive one!

Colour in bushveld birds

Article by Evidence Nkuna

Summer has arrived, and all the herbivores and omnivores have food and water because it is our rainy season. But all the species need to protect themselves from their enemies and be able to multiply. Colours are very important in many living organisms, e.g. flowers. Bright coloured flowers attract lots of insects to help with pollination, and some of the colours are a threat to other mammals because it is a sign of the plant being toxic.

In order to survive in the animal kingdom, an individual must find enough food to sustain itself while avoiding danger in the form of potential predators. Survival is about more than staying alive, it's being able to find a mate and reproduce successfully to ensure one's genes multiply.

Within the birds, species are divided between these two 'schools of survival' and both have their cost and benefits.

Having bright colours such as the lilac-breasted roller, makes a bird an appealing mate. His visual attire is



Colourful lilac-breasted roller Photo by Brian Rode

further enhanced by exhibitionist displays. The roller gets its name from its propensity to noisily take to the sky, flying upwards until it reaches an imaginary summit from whence it shoots downwards rocking side to side on its wings or 'rolling', all the while vocalizing in a less than songful manner.

Birds such as doves and sparrows select less for colour and more for tones that blend them into the environment. Remaining undetected by predators is a priority and they will rely more on courtship rituals and song to locate a partner and maintain pair bonds. Some of this duller species have hidden crests that can be erected to impress the females, such as the red-crested korhaan. This bird will only introduce its colourful head-crest when needed for courtship.

Some birds take blending in to the extreme and species such as nightjars, sandgrouse and scops-owl use cryptic colouration to mimic their surroundings so perfectly that they are almost undetectable.



Double-banded sandgrouse showing cryptic colouration

Photo by Brian Rode

January Gallery



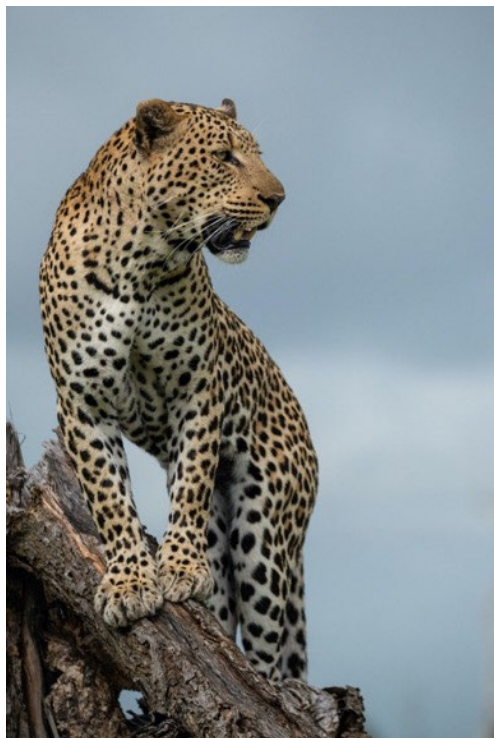
Dumbana (3:3) young male



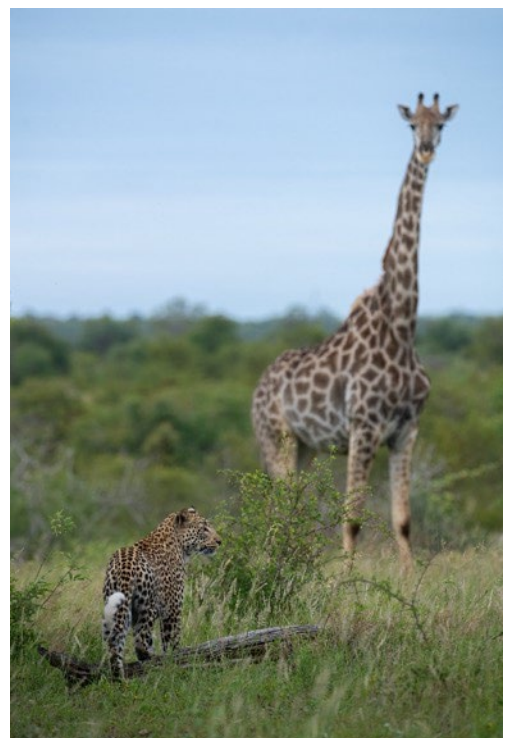
Sub-adult from the Mananga Pride



Elephant calf

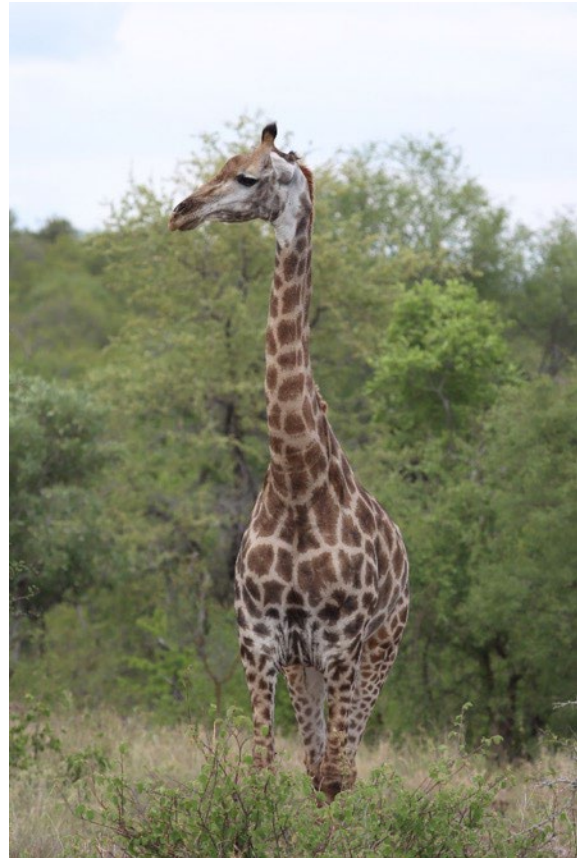


Mbiri Mbiri male



Dumbana (1:1) young male

Photos by Rudi Hulshoff



Photos by Damin Dallas & Evidence Nkuna



Photo by Rudi Hulshoff



Amur falcon

Photo by Brian Rode



Lebombo scenery

Photo by Brian Rode



Large tusker

Photo by Brian Rode



Grey heron

Photo by Brian Rode



African wild dogs

Photo by Brian Rode



Photo by Brian Rode