

SS
Singita



WILDLIFE JOURNAL
SINGITA SABI SAND, SOUTH AFRICA
For the month of January, Two Thousand and Twenty Four

Temperature

Average minimum: 20.3°C (68.58°F)

Average maximum: 30.5°C (86.99°F)

Minimum recorded: 17.0°C (62.60°F)

Maximum recorded: 35.0°C (95.00°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 78.2 mm

Season to date: 402.7 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:18

Sunset: 18:48

With summer in full swing the bushveld is humming with life. We have experienced the Xmobonyana and Mobeni Rivers flowing during the healthy downpours of rain that drenched our lands and awakened those that had waited so patiently for it. Dotted throughout the reserve foam nest frogs whip up their foam nests perfectly placed above pools of rainwater, pools that will host the foam nest frog tadpoles, other tadpoles, terrapins and even juvenile Nile crocodiles.

January also signals that start of the marula harvest - from elephants to people, the fruits are gathered at this time of year all over the eastern parts of southern Africa, and are eaten or used for skin care and making beer.

This summer has seen its fair share of heart-throbbing wildlife encounters and this month has been no different.

Dive right in to January's highlights:

Lions

- The lion dynamics of late have been astonishing, to say the least. The Mhangene Pride have made just two appearances on Singita this month. One of those sightings was when they finished off a whole buffalo within a day, clear signs that these cubs are developing quickly. Their generally westerly movements are due to the presence of two male lion coalitions coming in from the north and east.
- The Black Dam males have been seen along Eastern Sandveld as they are pushed south by the Ntsevu males. The Ntsevu males have now taken over the Nkuhuma Pride. The Plains Camp lions have had their work cut out for them as they defend their eastern boundary from these two young male lion coalitions.
- What this has all meant for small nomadic lions like the Nkuhuma Breakaway and the Tsalala female is that the central part of Singita has had very little activity from the larger Mhangene Pride. The Tsalala female is often found close to Tavangumi koppies and eastwards along the Sand River. She has also been seen mating with the larger Plains Camp lion. The Nkuhuma Breakaway has provided plenty of captivating viewing in the west and central parts of Ravenscourt as we have spent time with them on the prowl during the cooler summer days, that we have experienced this January.

Leopards

- At the turn of the new year the Xmobonyana female was seen carrying one cub into a densely vegetated riverbed. Sightings of this female have been sparse but she has been seen around Castleton.
- In the south there has been an increase in leopard activity with three different females in the area of Makhotini Dam. The Kigelia female has done a superb job of nurturing two cubs in her injured condition. Her older daughter the Jacana female has been seen not far from this area too.
- The eastern parts of Singita has seen the majority of leopard sightings with the Nkuwa female and her two male offspring, now just over a year of age, providing top quality wildlife encounters.
- In this area the Ntomi male, Xipuku and Senegal Bush males have been active in the same patch of bushveld as well.
- Tisela female and Thamba were mating at the start of the month in the western parts of Singita.

Cheetahs

- What an incredible run of cheetah viewing we are having! Frequent viewing of the territorial male in the south has provided weekly sightings of this cat. The long grass has created an ideal refuge for not only him but at least two other females. One that was seen feeding on an impala, and another that is being followed by her three cubs. This is the same female that was seen in November carrying one of her helpless cubs to a new temporary den.

Wild dogs

- A pack consisting of just three wild dogs, two males and a female, have been traveling far and wide in Singita Sabi Sand and the surrounding reserve. On a morning drive we watched them pursue a herd of impala which ended in them leading us to the Kigelia female leopard and her two cubs feeding on the remains of an impala kill. Unexpected encounters like this are so often the case when following a pack on the move.

Elephants

- With the marula trees dropping their bountiful harvest elephants are beelining between every fruit-bearing tree in the region. Game paths are being forged by elephants between the marula groves and grasses trampled at the base of the trees as the pachyderms search below for their prize. The fruit have also attracted many impressive bull elephants, most of which are in musth. This has also resulted in some tense stand offs between rival males of a similar size.

Buffalos

- Buffalo sightings have been abundant throughout the south and in the north. Herds have fragmented during this time of plenty. One of the more memorable moments with the big grazers was witnessing a cow give birth, just before sunset. A well-timed birth for this female who will recover quickly and produce much needed milk for her calf.

Bird List

An exciting month with some great birding. Specials included broad-billed roller, African cuckoo-hawk, Grey-backed sparrow-lark, yellow-rumped tinkerbird, gorgeous bushshrike, Cape white-eye, Eurasian hobby and marsh warbler. In total we saw 211 different species.



Some bush reflections follow, as well as the January Gallery of images.

Practice makes perfect

Article by George Nkuna

To the east of Boulders Lodge, sub-adult male giraffes engage in ritualized combat as part of their preparation for future dominance struggles. These skirmishes, characterized by the swinging of their long necks and forceful headbutting, serve to establish hierarchy within the giraffe community.

Observing these sparring sessions reveals a distinct pattern of strategic manoeuvres. Young giraffes practice precision in their movements, aiming to gain an advantage over potential rivals. These interactions contribute to the development of physical strength and coordination necessary for asserting dominance when maturity arrives.

Mentorship plays a crucial role as older, more experienced giraffes provide guidance to the younger ones. Through observational learning, the sub-adults acquire essential skills and tactics, ensuring a smoother transition into adulthood.



The giraffes' commitment to these combative exercises extends beyond individual growth. The collective knowledge gained from these interactions strengthens the social fabric of the group, fostering bonds that contribute to the overall stability and cooperation within the giraffe community.

As seasons change, the sub-adult giraffes continue refining their combat skills, each session an investment in their future roles. The outcome of these battles will determine their standing within the giraffe hierarchy, emphasizing the significance of these seemingly ritualistic confrontations in the survival and success of the species.

Afternoon game drive on a warm summer's day, lush green vegetation all around after the late summer rainfall of the year 2023. It was just a great day to be out and about looking for any excitement that Mother Nature might have on offer. Temperatures in the mid-thirties Celsius with a comfortable breeze which made the heat bearable.

We were making our way into the central section of the park. We stopped at a small dam with a resident hippopotamus who was giving a bit of a display as we arrived, yawning nonstop and jumping and splashing in the dam causing massive ripples which was entertaining. But there were other animals around like the ducks that were going about their business as usual and a buffalo bull came by for a drink and moved off. One character however caught our interest as this bird had his wings sagging almost to the ground and his little black tail was noticeably up with his yellow beak, making clicking sounds as he moved around on the edge of the dam. He was not going anywhere in particular, and he just seemed to be sending a message to one of his kind.

He seemed seriously unhappy about something, and as soon as other yellow-billed storks showed up at the dam, he changed his behaviour. He took off in an easterly direction, flying right passed the hippo who must have thought the bird was possessed because the bird flew so close that the hippo had to take evasive action to avoid being knocked out by a bird that seemed to have lost his senses when he saw the other storks.

He landed on the other side, on top of another bird, who also seemed interested in proving a point, and they started a fierce wrestling match using their curved beaks to attack each other. This lasted about a minute and they took it up a tree for another minute, then one decided he had enough and took off. We were captivated for about half an hour, our attention divided between a hippo and the angry birds, just wondering what the birds were all about and it became clear that the females had something to do with it, and the hippo was clearly trying to discourage us from overstaying our welcome.



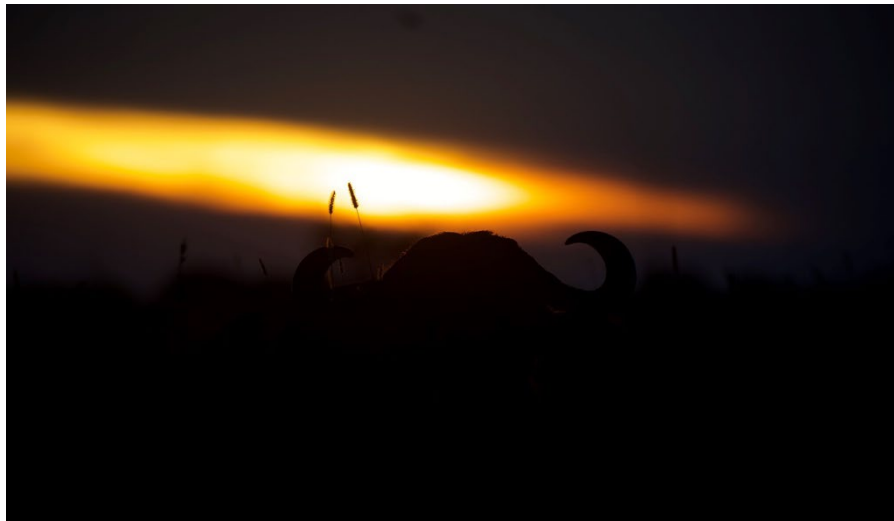
Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.

The unsung hero of the lodge

Article by Matt Durell

In the hustle and bustle of the safari lodge, there exists a silent hero that often goes unnoticed—the humble coffee machine. Nestled in a centre of the lodge, this unsung champion tirelessly serves as the backbone of our daily grind, providing a much-needed caffeine boost to fuel not only the staff's productivity, but guests excitement and participation on game drive.

From the crack of dawn before game drive, to the late hours of the evening after dinner, the coffee machine stands ready, always prepared to meet the demands of the lodge inhabitants. It caters to the early risers seeking morning motivation, the midday warriors requiring a jolt to power through the heat of the day, and the night owls hoping to catch some after sunset safari action. It's a constant companion, a reliable ally in the pursuit of the perfect day in the bush.



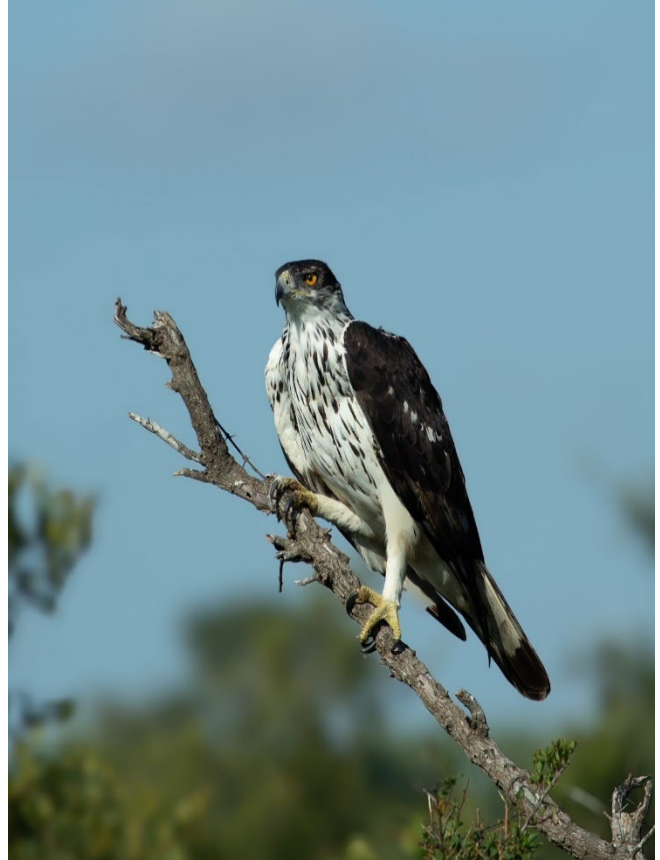
The rhythmic hum and occasional hiss of steam are the background melody to the guides and lodge staff's work day, signalling that another batch of liquid motivation is ready for consumption. The aromatic symphony that wafts through the lodge as the machine brews each cup is a sensory reminder that a moment of respite is just a few steps away.

Beyond its role as a caffeine dispenser, the coffee machine fosters a sense of community. Colleagues gather around it, swapping notes from the last game drive and sharing plans and ideas for the next one. It's a place where strangers become friends, sharing not only coffee but also snippets of their safari holiday, creating bonds that contribute to a rich vacation experience. It witnesses the highs and lows of each day—the hushed conversations in anticipation of what lies ahead, the collective sighs of relief when rare animals are found, and the joyous celebrations of a successful game drive.

The coffee machine, with its array of buttons and settings, may seem like a simple appliance, but its operation is an art! The unsung hero requires regular maintenance, cleaning, and the watchful eye of those who appreciate its significance. The diligent barista ensures a steady supply of coffee beans and an array of milk and sweeteners, recognizing that a well-stocked coffee corner is integral to the lodge.

As we navigate each day out in the African bush, let us take a moment to acknowledge and appreciate the hardworking coffee machine at our lodge. It may not have a corner office or a seat on game drives, but its role in fostering productivity, camaraderie, and a sense of belonging is invaluable. So, the next time you savour that cup of freshly brewed coffee, raise it in a silent toast to the unsung hero that keeps our lodge running smoothly—one cup at a time.

Twitter

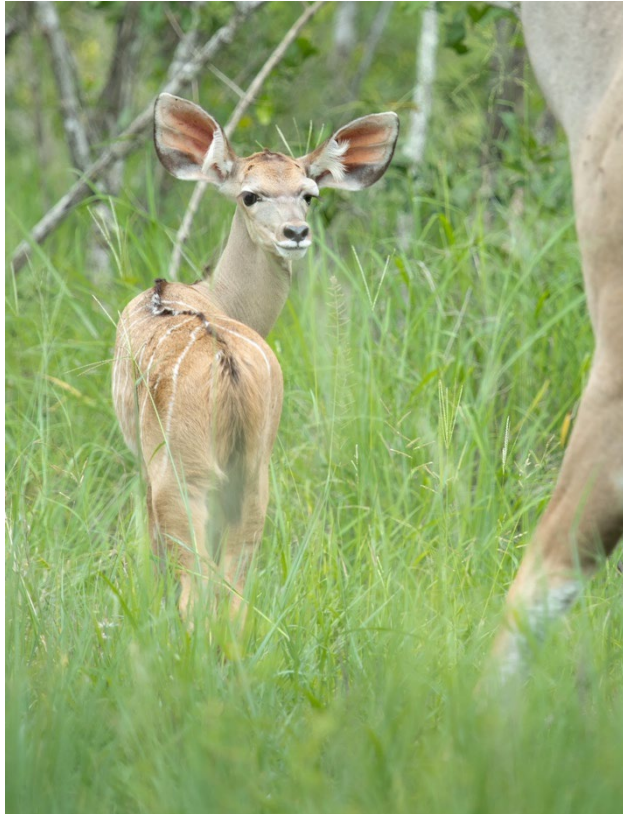


Two birds at the top of their respective food chains, the goliath heron (left) and an African hawk eagle (right).



Iconic - the African fish eagle (left), and everyone's favourite feathered friend, the lilac-breasted roller.
All images by Marc Bowes-Taylor.

January Gallery



A young kudu calf takes in its new surroundings. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



The impala lambs are plentiful throughout the reserve at the moment and their bleating calls can be heard far and wide. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



The Tisela female leopard poised near the Thamba male leopard during a recent bout of mating.



Spots and rosettes. A male cheetah scans back before continuing on his territorial patrol, while a young male leopard cubs curiously gazes towards a safari vehicle. Images by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



A ground hornbill descending to the feeding grounds. Image by Matt Durell.



Every photographer's dream, a leopard on a granite rock.
Captured in the eastern part of Singita, by Matt Durell.



African wild dogs make quick work of a meal.
The arresting gaze of an exquisite leopard.

