

Singita



Khandziya Female – Photo by Monika Malewski

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

Temperature

Average minimum: 19.5°C (67.1°F)
Minimum recorded: 13.0°C (55.4°F)
Average maximum: 32.5°C (90.5°F)
Maximum recorded: 39.0°C (102.2°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 62 mm
Season to date: 62 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sept)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05h05
Sunset: 18h05

October in Singita Kruger National Park began with dry, dusty conditions. The grasslands were still dominated by shades of brown and yellow, and most of the vegetation had gone dormant, waiting for the first rains. Midway through the month, the change began to show. The first cuckoos arrived, their calls marking the start of the breeding season and signalling that rain was near. Soon after, frogs began calling from the pans and drainage lines, followed by the distinctive bubbling call of the Burchell's coucal — a reliable indicator of rain on the way. Two days later, the first significant showers fell across the reserve. The ground soaked it up quickly, and within days green shoots began pushing through the soil. Insects, particularly termites and flying ants,

became active almost immediately, providing food for birds, reptiles, and other small predators. The bush had begun its shift from the dry season into summer.

A Sightings Snapshot for October follows:

Lions

- The Mananga Pride has seen a small but noticeable change this month. Their numbers have dropped to 14, (7 adults and 7 cubs), down by two cubs since September. It's always tough to witness these losses, but the good news is that the remaining cubs are looking healthy and strong, giving them a better chance of surviving into adulthood.
- Earlier this month, three of the Mananga lionesses were seen with two of the Sonop males, feeding on a zebra carcass. Nothing unusual there — but what happened next was quite unexpected. The same group was later spotted feeding on a klipspringer high on the rocky ridge. While we didn't witness the hunt itself, it's very likely they stole the kill from a leopard, as klipspringers are extremely agile and not a typical target for lions. Still, it was a rare sighting and a reminder of how opportunistic and competitive life can be out here.
- The Chava Pride has been more elusive this month, with sightings limited to two adult females who were seen either alone or accompanied by the two subadults and a group of 11 cubs. One morning, the subadults were spotted alone in an open clearing with just a single cub, raising some concern. The two adult females were later located nearby, though notably without the remainder of the cubs. Tragically, the pride suffered the loss of two adult females last month due to natural causes. This reduction in adult numbers may affect the security and cohesion of the group, particularly for the cubs. We continue to monitor the situation closely, hoping for stability in the coming weeks.
- Towards the end of the month, we had an incredible sighting of two Sonop males along with part of the Chava Pride feeding on a buffalo carcass. Both males were so full their bellies were almost dragging on the ground — a clear sign they'd been feasting for hours. As the sun reached that intense point in the morning where everything begins to bake, one of the brothers finally got up and wandered off. We followed at a distance as he moved slowly through the bush, eventually leading us to a small pool where he lapped at the muddy water.
- A massive hippo succumbed to the ever-testing times of the African wilderness and was found dead toward the end of the month in the N'wanetsi River. As cruel as she may seem, Nature does not waste, and the crocodiles, three Mananga lioness and all three Sonop males feasted for a few days.

Leopards

- Most of our leopard sightings this month have been thanks to the Dumbana female and her daughter. We have had nearly daily sightings of either one or both of them, often moving through the area or resting in the shade. One particularly interesting sighting involved both leopards at the same impala carcass. It is unclear who made the kill as both had fed by the time we arrived. While the young female is nearing full independence, opportunistic feeding remains common, particularly between related individuals. Dumbana moved off the following day, leaving her daughter to feed on the carcass for the next two days.
- There were some interesting interactions between the Dumbana and Nhlangueni females this month. Dumbana had killed a year-old impala and was found feeding on it in a guarri thicket, thanks to one of our guide and tracker teams who had noticed a drag-mark across the road. Leopards, as well as lions, will drag the carcass under a tree, or some form of cover, to eat away from the piercing eyes of other predators and vultures. She fed for most of the afternoon and early evening before retiring a few metres away from the carcass to groom herself and sleep. The next morning it was Nhlangueni that was found feeding on the remains of the young impala ewe. That afternoon both females had probably headed straight to Xinenene-poort, the only remaining water source in the area. Being a hot-spot for

animals, we went to investigate on our afternoon game drive, to find Dumbana lying near the water. A few minutes later she was sprinting across the rocks with Nhlangueni hot on her heels. They leapt over the rocky ridge and disappeared. Territory overlap is normal this time of the year and encounters with other individuals inevitable.

- A few shy individuals have been spotted around the concession, most likely due to the shrinking availability of water. They are now being forced into areas where they come into contact with vehicles, whereas during the wet season they can remain deep within the vast wilderness areas that are still untouched by roads.
- As Dumbana's daughter comes of age, she is beginning to show her own personality and unique traits. As a team, we have decided to name her the Khandziya female — a Shangaan word meaning "one who often climbs trees."

African wild dogs

- We've been absolutely privileged to have a pack of African wild dogs on our concession these past two weeks of the month. It is the pack that was found denning in the granophyre ridge in August; the two adult males, one adult female and five pups (now around four months old). Their movements have stretched from the far north of the concession down to the southern reaches near the lodges, allowing for frequent and rewarding sightings. We've observed them on several hunts, primarily targeting impala, though on one occasion they successfully brought down a male steenbuck, another common prey species for these efficient predators. What makes this presence extra special is how much space wild dogs require. In the Kruger National Park region, packs easily cover 800 km² of habitat (> 80,000 ha). That means simply to sustain their hunting, roaming and social needs they cover enormous tracts of land. Their regular presence on our concession which is roughly 15 000 ha/ 37 000 acres is therefore an exceptional opportunity.

Elephants

- Elephant sightings within our concession in the Kruger have been nothing short of spectacular recently. Several very young calves have been observed among the herds, a wonderful sign of a thriving population. Large congregations of elephants have frequently gathered along the N'wanetsi River, where the availability of water draws multiple family groups together. One particularly memorable evening, as the sun set and a golden-amber light filtered across the landscape, the grasslands near Gudzane Dam were alive with movement as more than 80 elephants spread across the open plains, including several enormous bulls. It was a truly breath-taking scene that filled the air with a deep sense of awe and connection to the wild heart of Africa.

Spotted hyenas

- Sightings of spotted hyenas have been notably scarce this month. The previously active den-site shows no recent signs of use, suggesting that the cubs have reached an age where they are now accompanying the adults on their nightly movements rather than remaining at the den. Observations have been limited to one or two individuals seen roaming independently during the early evening hours, often moving purposefully through the area before disappearing into the surrounding bush.

Buffalos

- October brought limited buffalo activity across the Singita Kruger National Park concession, with just a single large herd of approximately 150 individuals recorded this month. The remaining sightings consisted mostly of small bachelor groups, frequently encountered near the last remaining pools of water scattered throughout the area. As the dry season reaches its peak and grazing becomes increasingly scarce, buffalo herds tend to lose condition and adapt by forming larger aggregations for greater protection and collective strength. These herds become highly nomadic, travelling extensive

distances in search of adequate forage and water sources, a behaviour that reflects the challenges of this harsh, resource-limited time of year.

Plains game

- The game paths have become etched into the earth, winding their way around the last remaining pools in the river and through a small valley linking two dry riverbeds. In an almost choreographed procession, zebra, wildebeest, elephant, and buffalo move in steady waves along these dusty corridors — a daily back-and-forth pilgrimage to water. The grasses, now cropped short and sparse, have opened up the landscape, revealing the usually secretive duiker and steenbuck, and offering rare glimpses of the elusive Sharpe's grysbok. Each movement, each track in the sand, tells the story of a landscape holding its breath before the rains return.

Rare animals and other sightings

- This month also brought some rare sightings. We had a few minutes of quiet observation of a white-tailed mongoose moving steadily along the dirt road. On three separate occasions, we encountered a serval! Twice she was even accompanied by her kitten, both fairly calm and allowing us a decent view before slipping away. Meanwhile, a sable antelope was spotted at a distance; it bolted as soon as it caught sight of us, highlighting its cautious nature in this part of the reserve where it's rarely seen.

Birds

- The air is alive with the melodic calls of the migratory European bee-eaters, joined by the distinctive notes of Deiderick's, Klaas's and red-chested cuckoos, their songs echoing through the riparian woodland once more. Along the riverbanks, black-backed puffbacks are a delight to watch as they flit among the branches, their downy feathers puffed up to give them the charming appearance of tiny snowballs. With the river's water level steadily receding under the harsh temperatures, gatherings of herons, egrets, and storks have become a common sight, taking advantage of the concentrated aquatic life. A particularly striking sighting this week was a majestic secretary bird, perched regally on a woolly-caper bush that crowns a tall Delagoa thorn.

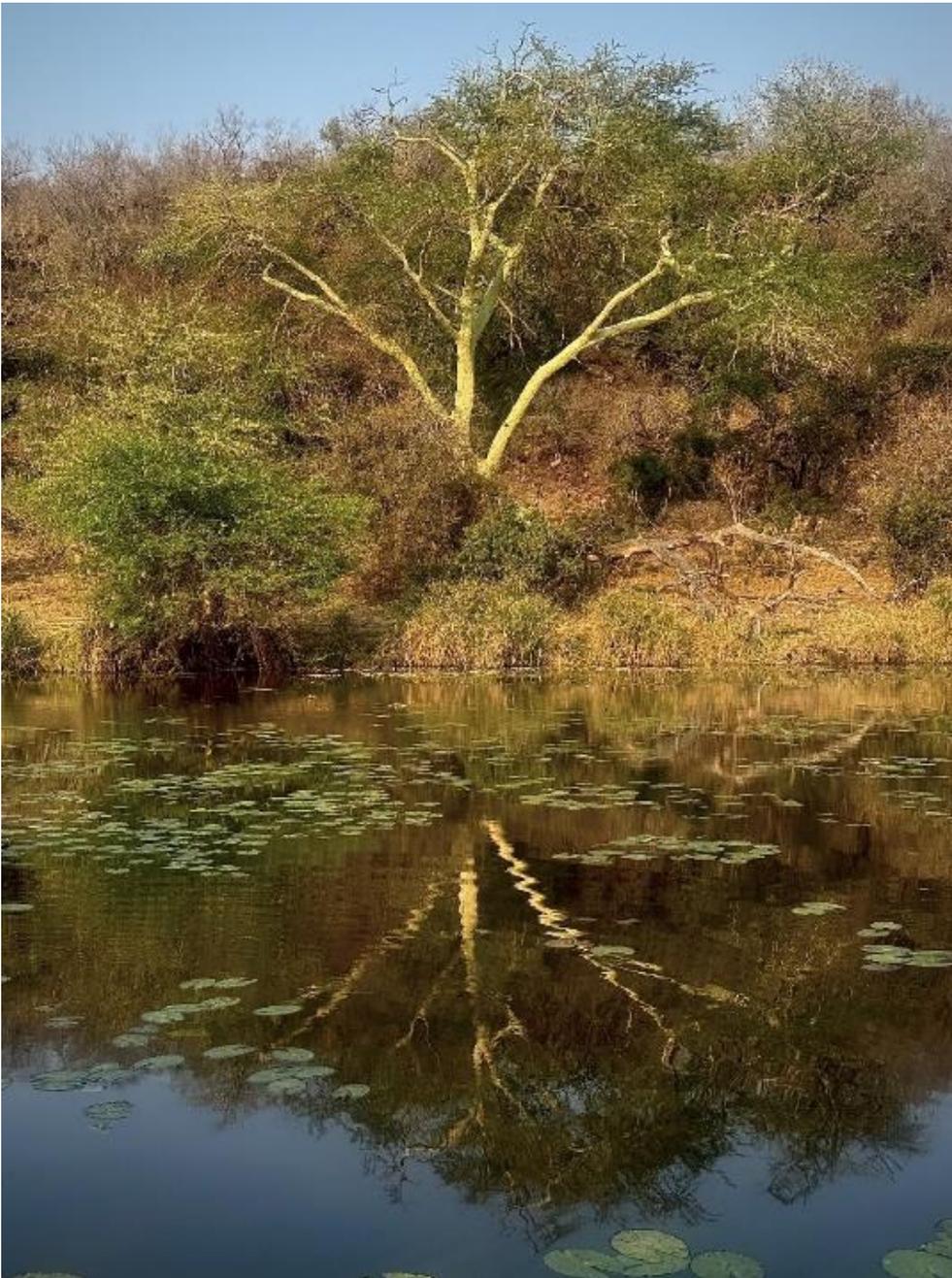
Some Bush Stories follow, as well as the October Gallery.

The fever tree's golden secret

Article by Walter Mabelane
Photos by Monika Malewski

There's a certain light that fills the bushveld when the morning mist lifts off the river, and the first sun rays touch the bark of a fever tree. It's a pale gold, almost luminous — a kind of glow that makes these trees seem alive with their own quiet energy. Here along the N'wanetsi River, the fever trees (*Vachellia xanthophloea*) stand like guardians of the water, their reflections rippling in the slow current.

Most guests are struck by their colour first — that smooth, yellow-green bark so unlike anything else in the savanna. But the fever tree's brilliance is not just skin deep. Its presence tells us a story about water, life, and ancient beliefs that have flowed through this land for generations.



The ecology of the fever tree:
Fever trees favour riverbanks and seasonal floodplains — places where the soil stays moist long after the rains have gone. Their roots stretch deep into the alluvial layers, drawing from the steady underground supply. These fertile, oxygen-rich soils nurture not just the trees themselves but a host of life around them: vervet monkeys leaping between branches, herons roosting in the canopy, and even hippos resting in their shade during the hottest hours. By binding the riverbanks, fever trees prevent erosion, holding the land together during the torrent of summer storms. In a sense, they are the park's natural engineers — quiet custodians maintaining the delicate balance between land and water. And where fever trees grow, the ecosystem hums with vitality.

The spirit of the tree:

Among the local Tsonga and Shangaan people, the fever tree carries meaning that goes beyond ecology. Its yellow bark, when ground into a fine powder, is sometimes used in traditional rituals as a *muthi* — a good luck charm. Elders say that this golden powder can attract prosperity, protect travellers, and open the path for new beginnings. Hunters once rubbed a little on their foreheads before setting out, believing it would bring success and safety on the journey. But with all such beliefs, there's respect. One doesn't simply take from the fever tree. A small offering — a song, a whispered greeting, a sprinkle of river sand — is given before collecting its bark. The tree, they say, holds the spirit of the river itself, and taking from it without gratitude may anger the ancestors.

The fever tree and its misunderstood name:

Interestingly, the name "fever tree" came from early European settlers who noticed that malaria was common in areas where these trees grew. They thought the trees caused the fevers, not realizing that the real culprit was the mosquito that also favoured these swampy habitats. In truth, the fever tree was not the cause of sickness but a sign of life — a signal that water, and therefore mosquitoes, were nearby.

A golden thread:

Today, as I guide guests beneath their luminous canopies, I like to think of fever trees as bridges — between science and story, between ecology and belief. They remind us that the bush is not just a landscape of animals and plants, but a living tapestry woven with meaning. When the wind rustles through their leaves at dusk, and the light fades into that soft African gold, I sometimes catch the scent of dust and sap and river air — and I understand why our elders say the fever tree brings luck. Standing beneath one, it's impossible not to feel blessed.



10 reasons NOT to go on safari

Article by Monika Malewski

Ah yes, the African safari. Overrated, over-hyped, and honestly, who wants to watch a lion nap under a marula tree while sipping a perfectly chilled G&T from the comfort of a luxury, safari, converted Landcruiser anyway? As a professional safari guide here at Singita Kruger National Park, I feel it's only fair to warn you—with a totally objective and not at all sarcastic list as to why you should absolutely *not* go on safari.

1. There's just too much wildlife

- Everywhere you turn—elephants lumbering past your suite like they've got somewhere to be, impalas bouncing around like they're late for gym class, and leopards reclining in trees like they invented relaxation. If you prefer a more controlled wildlife experience (i.e. your cat on TikTok), best stay home.

2. Sunrises that will spoil you for life

- Who needs vibrant pink and orange African sunrises with mist rising from the grasslands and a chorus of birdsong? Better to stay indoors where your alarm clock screams at you and your breakfast is soggy cereal, not Eggs Benedict served with panoramic views of the Sweni River.

3. It's *too* quiet

- No traffic. No sirens. No one yelling into a cellphone about quarterly reports. Just the distant call of a fish eagle, maybe the low rumble of a lion saying good morning from two kilometres away. Honestly, it's deafening how peaceful it is.



4. Luxury suites that are far too comfortable

- You might get stuck in your suite—spacious, stylish, air-conditioned, with views over the bushveld so mesmerizing it feels like a moving painting. You'll lie in bed wondering if it's rude to ignore a monkey staring at you from a few metres away. Spoiler: it's not.

5. Your guide will ruin your ignorance

- One moment you're just here for the lions, the next you're explaining the social hierarchy of hyena clans to your friends. Our guides have this terrible habit of teaching you things—fascinating things—about ecosystems, animal behaviour, and which animal's dung you're currently photographing. You've been warned.



6. The food is absurdly delicious

- Forget campfire beans. Think artisanal everything. Fresh, seasonal ingredients. Wines that know more about flavour pairings than you do. Dishes designed to impress Michelin inspectors... but served to you in the middle of the African bush. How dare they?

7. You might cry at a giraffe

- You think you're coming for "a bit of wildlife," and suddenly there you are, tears in your eyes, watching a giraffe glide across the horizon at sunset. Safari has a nasty habit of making people feel deeply. It's not your fault. Africa just does that.

8. You'll see the big five... and forget about them

- You arrive wanting to tick lions, leopards, rhinos, buffalo, and elephants off a list. But then you fall head over heels for the lilac-breasted roller. Or a chameleon the size of your thumb. Or a dung beetle pushing a perfectly spherical ball with the confidence of a Vegas showman. It's the gateway drug to lifelong birdwatching. Don't say we didn't warn you.

9. You'll accidentally make human connections

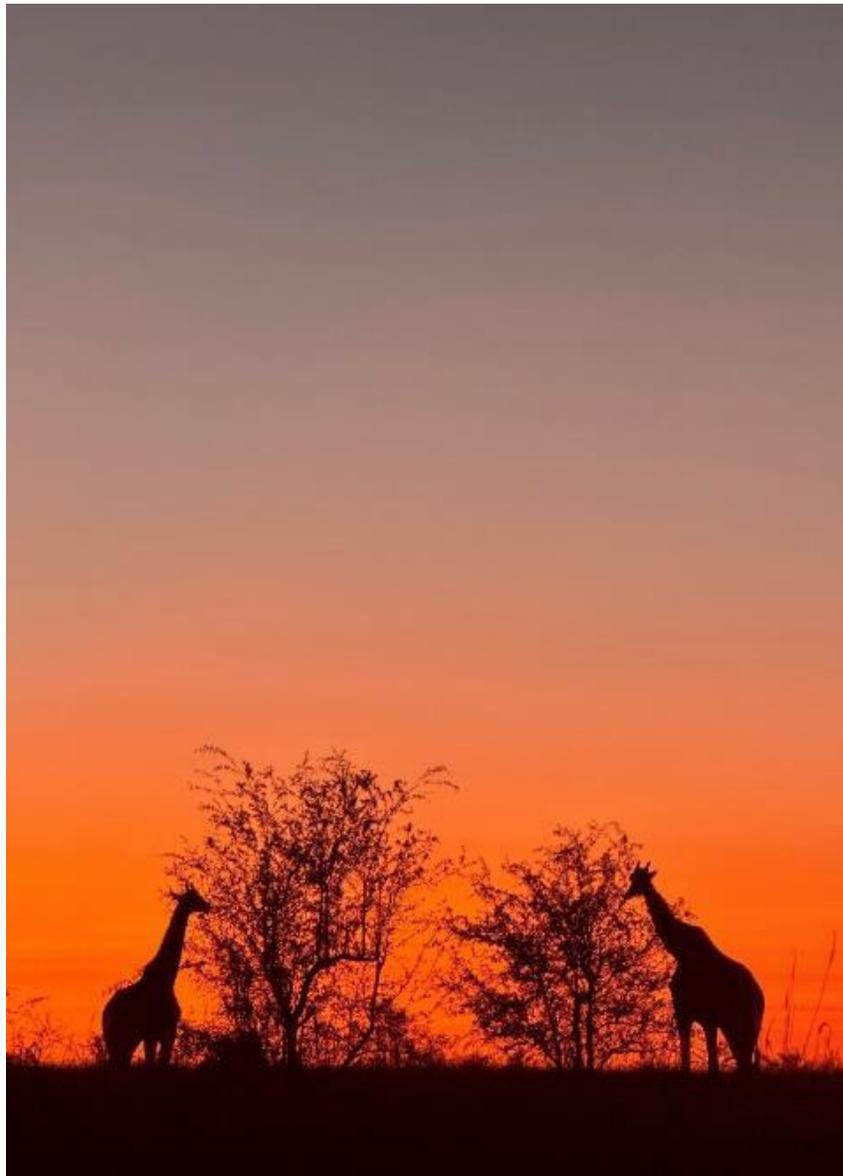
- Between your field guide, who might switch off all the lights while on the way back one evening, and tell you to look up to a sky so full of stars it looks fake, the tracker who spots a leopard before you've even noticed a tree, and the staff who greet you by name and somehow remember your exact tea order—it's all *far too personal*. And don't get me started on other guests. You might leave with... *friends*.

10. It will change you forever

- This is the biggest danger of all. You come to see animals and leave having rediscovered silence, wonder, patience—and maybe even yourself. You'll start dreaming about elephants, obsessing over conservation, and planning your return before you've even boarded the plane.

So please, don't go on safari... Unless you're prepared to fall in love. With the wild, with nature, with the rhythm of life untouched by city noise and Wi-Fi notifications.

But if you *must* risk it, we'll be waiting for you at Singita.



October Gallery



Sonop male – Photo by Graeme Stuart



Zebra – Photo by Damin Dallas

Giant plated-lizard – Photo by Monika Malewski





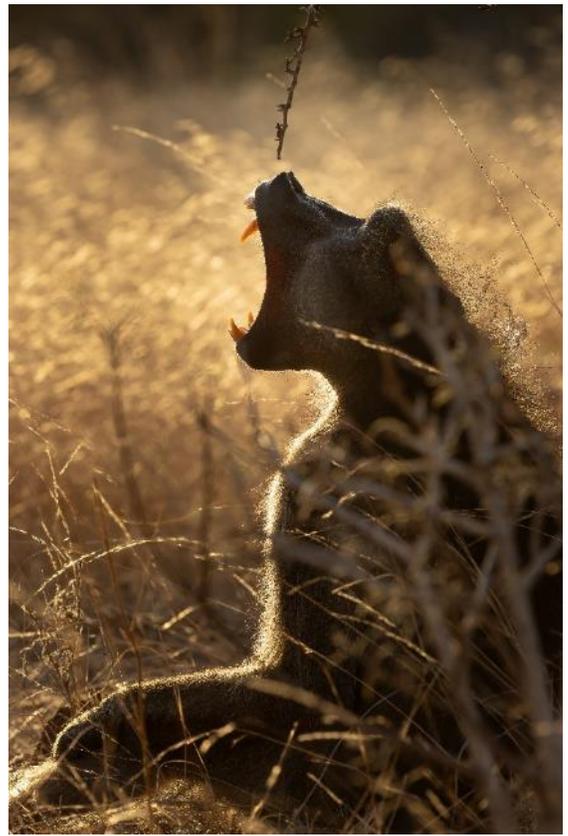
Brindled gnu (wildebeest) - Photo by Monika Malewski

Nhlanguleni female – Photo by Graeme Stuart





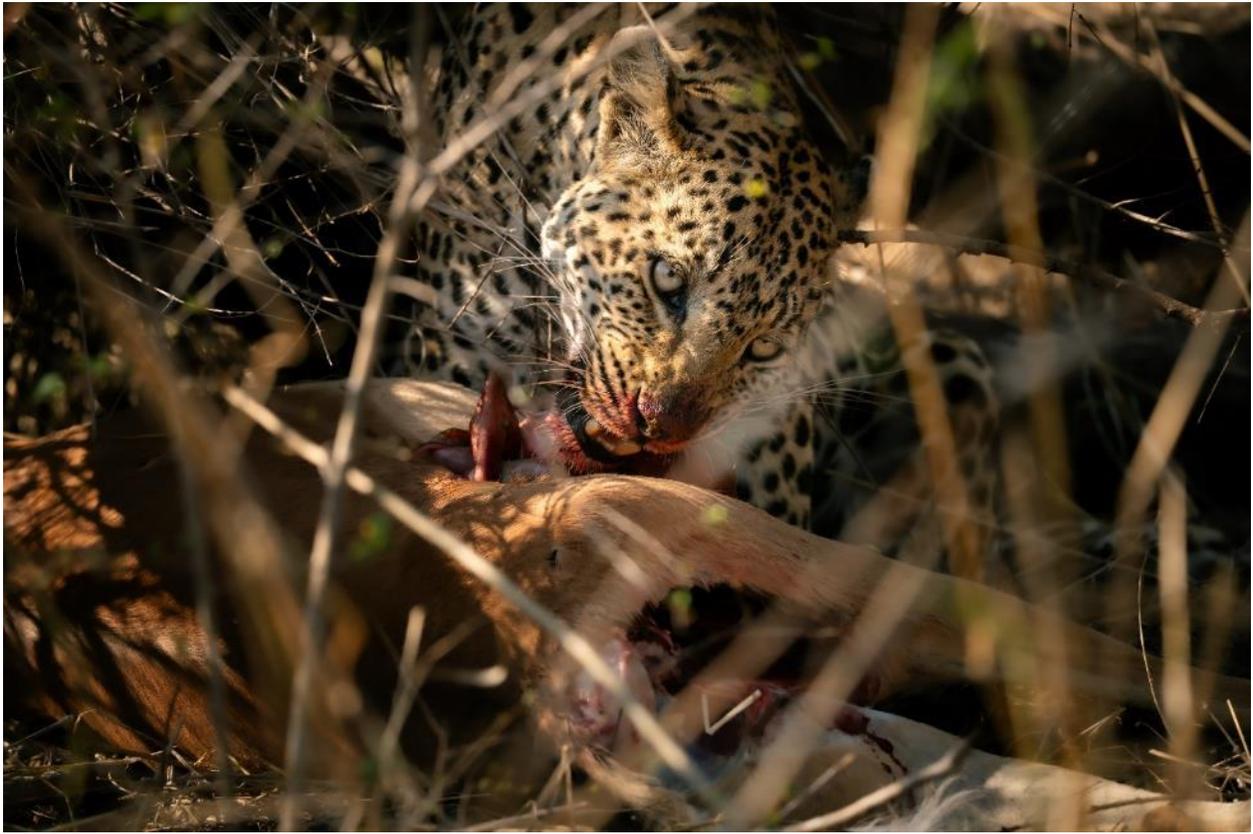
African fish-eagle – Photo by Monika Malewski



Chacma baboon – Photo by Graeme Stuart

Elephant Family – Photo by Monika Malewski





Dumbana female – Photo by Monika Malewski

Mananga pride – Photo by Monika Malewski





Nhlangueni female – Photo by Graeme Stuart



Lionesses feeding – Photo by Monika Malewski

Tree Agama – Photo by Monika Malewski



Compiled by Monika Malewski