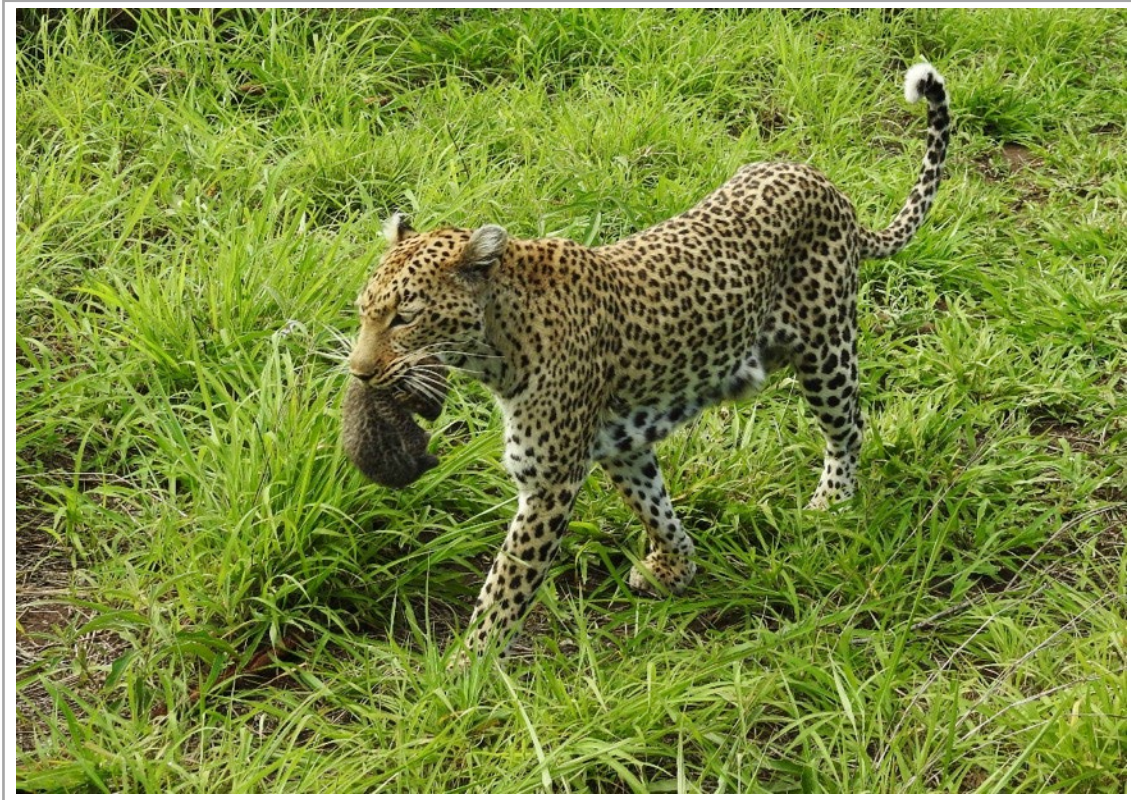


Singita



Leopard carrying her tiny cub - Photo by Brian Rode

WILDLIFE JOURNAL

SINGITA KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA

For November, Two Thousand and Twenty-three

Temperature

Average Minimum: 20°C (68°F)

Minimum recorded: 14°C (57.2°F)

Average maximum: 34°C (93.2°F)

Maximum recorded: 45°C (113°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 31 mm

Season* to date: 53 mm

(*Season = Oct to Sep)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 04:55

Sunset: 18:24

November has been a month of contrasts within the Kruger National Park. What started as a rather cool and very rainy month has turned into the typical sweltering hot savannah summer. With almost two consecutive weeks of over 40°C (104 °F) much of the new green flush is turning yellow, and mud wallows have become the main hub of activity in the weight of the dense hot air. The woodland kingfishers and red-chested cuckoos fill the natural silence, and when they take a break the cicadas take over – it's the familiar sound of summer lulling us into a midday siesta. The impala lambing season is now in full swing with hundreds of delightful, bug-eyed, longed-legged lambs taking their first steps.

Here's a Sightings Snapshot for November:

Lions

- With the onset of the rains, sightings of the Shish Pride have been irregular. They spent a good portion of the beginning of the month in the west of our concession near the Dumbana Drainage. The limping female, one of her younger sisters, and their five most recent cubs were seen on the rocky ridges in the southwest until one afternoon when they felt it was time to introduce the newest members to the rest of the pride. Since then, sightings of the Shish Pride have been a jaw-dropping experience of a total of 24 lions when the Trichardt males are in attendance. Towards the end of the month, the Shish Pride had moved back east around the granophyre in the Lebombo mountains.
- The Trichardt males are proving to be serious about taking over Mananga Pride territory and sightings of them this month have ranged from far south to north, both in the concession, as well as into the Mananga trails area west of the S41. They had separated at the beginning of the month with one male patrolling the south and the other following the Mananga Pride in the north of our concession, until meeting again to check up on the Shish Pride. They must keep tabs on this pride as the 15 cubs are still vulnerable to any intruding males.
- Maputu and Xai Xai lions were seen in the northern reaches around Ingwe/Nkayanini south, both looking well fed and in good condition.
- The Mananga Pride has yet to settle after the death of Xihamham and the pride remains separated into a group of adult females, with whom the Trichardt male has been mating; and a group of subadult males and females, who are trying to avoid the Trichardt males after their last encounter. Fortunately for the maturing young males, the Trichardt males do not seem to feel threatened enough to eliminate the youngsters, but rather just keep them away from the main portion of the pride.
- An unknown pride of seven females, one subadult male and one adult male were seen this month near the western region of our concession. They are most likely from an area in Kruger or even Mozambique with few roads and/or vehicles, as they appeared to be shy and kept their distance from us, reiterating the fact of just how wild and isolated a wilderness area we are privileged to work in.

Leopards

- At least nine different leopards were seen this month, including an unnamed male that is slowly becoming more of a regular character seen in the western basalt plains around Mangwa, Nuthlwa, and the N4.
- Nhlangueni female has been active between the valley around Nhlangueni and Ntoma/Three-trees and on the 7th of November one of our guides was fortunate enough to see her carrying one tiny cub up the rocky ridge north of the Nhlangueni drainage. It was still very young, possibly only a week or two old, and we do not know if there are more, but we can assume that the den-site is near there.
- Since their return, the Dumbana brothers have once again stolen the spotlight and incredibly returned to their old territories and habits. Dumbana 3:3 is still hunting baboons along the river and Dumbana 1:1, rivalling his brother's ferocity, was seen feeding on an impala ewe in the middle of this month.
- Both Nhlangueni's previous female cubs have been seen this month, one near the central depression and the other more east in the Lebombo mountains, stalking the new impala lambs.
- Monzo has been sighted on his regular patrol along the N'wanetsi River and stalking nyalas just outside the lodges.

Cheetahs

- One female was sighted this month in the central depression.

Wild dogs

- There were five sightings of wild dogs this month. The Floppy-Ear Pack is doing well with at least eight pups having survived their first few months. Another pack with an individual with a split in his ear was seen for a few days on the H6 near the S37 and, as expected during the impala lambing season, more dogs were seen hunting these new and vulnerable impalas in the central areas of our concession.

Spotted hyenas

- Individuals from the three prominent clans have been seen throughout the concession this month. Most sightings were of one or two animals following other predators, for example the Shish Pride; and individual hyenas waiting at the base of trees for carcasses hoisted by leopards to fall.

Buffalos

- A large herd has been moving back and forth across the H6 near Sonop Waterhole and an old, injured bull has taken refuge amongst the tall trees and shrubs along the N'wanetsi River near Euphorbia Crossing, managing to evade the lions the entire month!

Elephants

- With sightings of breeding herds and large solitary bulls every day this month, there has been no shortage of elephants. Perhaps due to the large tracts of land that were burnt earlier this year, the elephants appear to have spread the word, and around every corner, one can find them tucking into the new sweet grasses.
- The basalt plains have been host to congregations of breeding herds numbering up to 150 elephants.
- One particular herd that has been moving through the concession has a dwarf female, recognizable by her adult-sized head and body but very short legs.

Plains game

- Now that the grass has had time to grow, the zebra and wildebeest herds are moving from the previously burnt areas in the mountains to the nutritious and open plains in the west. Some days over 300 zebras have been seen together.
- Waterbuck are abundant along the N'wanetsi River and near the Gudzane Dam.
- Most of the impala ewes have given birth with nurseries of lambs starting to form.
- Baboons, monkeys, and even the giraffe have given birth, taking advantage of this time of plenty. Young baby monkeys can be seen clinging onto their mothers' chests as they forage.

Rare animals and other sightings

- As in October, the same female eland has been seen by a few more guides this month. She seems to have relaxed more around the vehicles, albeit at a distance. She does not take off at first sight anymore, but will instead continue feeding.
- A relaxed serval was seen in the grasslands.
- The black-backed jackals have returned to sodic sites in the central depression and even a pair of ostriches were seen feeding near Pebble Pan.

Birds

- The woodland kingfishers have returned, but we are still awaiting the intense persistent calls that signal the start of the heavy rains for summer.
- A glossy ibis was seen at the N'wanetsi Crossing, a spot along the river where we tend to see most of our weird and wonderful water birds.
- This month the white-backed night herons have been seen around Dave's Crossing.
- The blue-cheeked bee-eaters and grey-headed kingfishers are once again active along the N'wanetsi and up to the Ostrich Link open area.

- Near the Mozambican border, crested guineafowls were seen around a permanent body of water called Maputo Pan.
- The nest of a white-bellied sunbird was found hidden amongst a colony of community web spiders near Butterfly Crossing.
- Towards the end of the month, two unusual birds were seen in the concession. One morning a house crow arrived at the lodge and perched on one of the satellite towers. Unfortunately house crows are alien invasive birds (originally from India). They settled mainly in the Durban area, but have since spread into the rest of the country. This sighting was only the second sighting of a house crow in the Kruger National Park. Right at the end of the month, one of our guides found and photographed a golden pipit fairly close to the lodge. This is an extremely rare vagrant to South Africa (possibly fewer than 40 sightings have been recorded in southern Africa). This is the third sighting of a golden pipit that has been recorded in our area in the last five years.



Newborn impala lamb – Photo by Rudi Hulshof

Some articles and stories follow, as well as the November Gallery.

Nature and game drives are not all about finding the Big Five like many tourists believe. There are millions of little things that connect the life chain and balance nature.

Early this month I guided a honeymoon couple, it was their first time on safari, their first time in Africa. All they wanted to see was the Big 5. As they were here for a couple of nights they had a great chance to see all of the Big Five as they wished, and also some other animals and different birds that we have in our concession. On their last morning, we decided not to go far as we had to come back early for departure, so we took Nwanetsi Road to go down to Dumbana Pools for hippo viewing. We got off the vehicle and took a short walk to the rocks where it was safe for us to view hippos in the pool. Upon our arrival there were lots of crocodiles on the sand banks of the pool itself, some went in the water and some stayed there. Hippos were also present. We sat on the rocks and enjoyed the morning sun and watched the hippos doing their thing, vocalizing and yawning. It was so great to watch them with a pair of binoculars to see all the details. By scanning around the guests started to watch the "alligators" on the sand bank and enjoyed seeing all their details too and wanting to know more about them.

Crocodiles differ from alligators in their teeth arrangement. When a crocodile's mouth is closed, a tooth (the fourth mandibular) sticks up on either side. In alligators, this tooth is not visible. Crocodile teeth do not articulate against one another in the manner that mammal teeth do. Because of this, crocodiles cannot bite with any kind of slicing effect and to consume prey that they have caught crocodiles must employ a technique known as a death roll. Clamping firmly onto a piece of floating carcass with its gripping teeth, the crocodile will then spin itself laterally until the chunk of meat comes free. Then with a few chomps of the jaws to flatten the mouthful (not chew it), it gulps the piece down. There are gular flaps at the back of the mouth that it can close so that it can swallow underwater without choking or drowning. Valved nostrils also prevent water from getting into unwanted places while a crocodile dives deep underwater.

Contrary to popular belief, crocodiles eat mainly fish, the most common source of food in Lowveld rivers. These they swallow whole. Crocodiles are important in river ecosystems for controlling the number of catfish. They are, however, opportunistic hunters and will ambush mammal prey coming to drink at the water's edge, particularly in the dry season.

A crocodile's teeth are replaced continuously throughout its life when the new one grows up from below while the older ones are forced out. Crocodiles have clawed feet and webbed hind feet. These help the crocodile manoeuvre itself for well-timed attacks and the claws are vital for the traction on land and for digging during the breeding season. The tail of a crocodile is a very powerful rudder. It is flattened laterally and propels the crocodile effortlessly through the water when it swims. The tail also acts as a fat-storing system, essential sustenance for times of forced fasts.

Being ectothermic crocodiles are prone to spending many hours basking in the sun to warm up. But with crocodiles, basking may also be used for the opposite function of cooling down. By lying on sand banks with their mouth open, they allow themselves to lose heat by evaporative cooling from the moist inner parts of their mouths.

The sex of a hatchling is determined by the temperature of the soil in which they were incubated. Lower temperatures produce females and higher temperatures produce males.

My guests were so happy to know about crocodiles and refer to them correctly – it was one of their many highlights of a honeymoon safari!



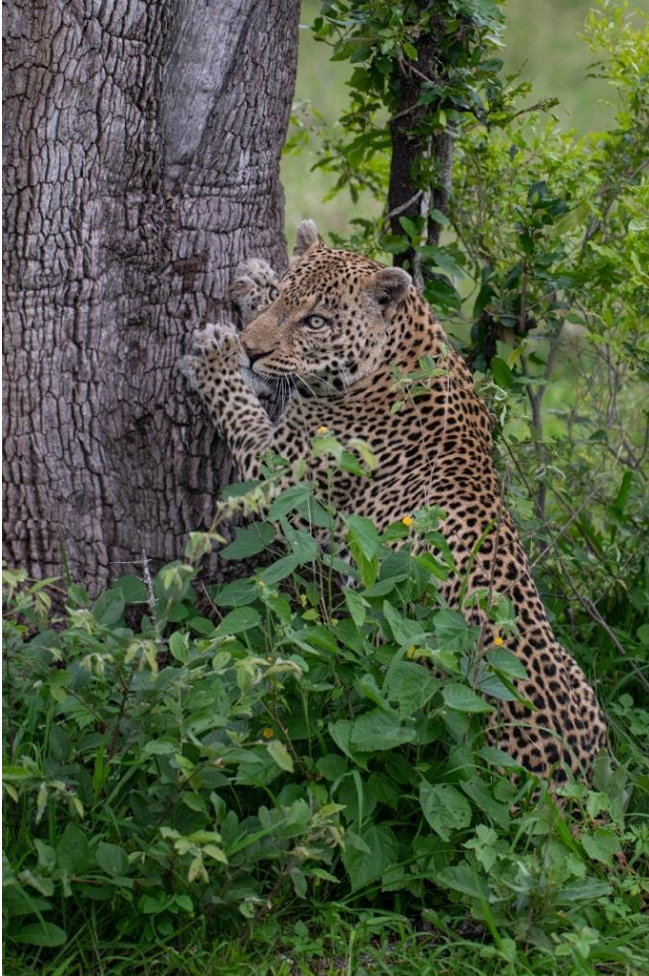
At Singita Lebombo, the reptilian residents, particularly the flap-necked chameleon (*Chamaeleo dilepis*), add a captivating dimension to the rich biodiversity of the region. Renowned for their mesmerizing ability to change skin colour, these chameleons employ chromatophores, specialized cells containing pigments, to achieve this remarkable feat. The colour alterations serve various purposes, from communication and camouflage to thermoregulation.

One of the flap-necked chameleon's distinctive features is its long, projectile tongue, which plays a pivotal role in hunting. The chameleon relies on its exceptional eyesight to spot prey, and once a target is identified, the tongue is rapidly extended toward it with incredible precision. This method allows them to catch insects, their primary source of sustenance, from a distance without alerting potential prey. Interestingly, the chameleon's tongue is equipped with a specialized adhesive pad at the tip, ensuring a secure grip on the captured prey. The entire process occurs in a fraction of a second, showcasing the chameleon's remarkable agility and adaptability in its natural habitat.

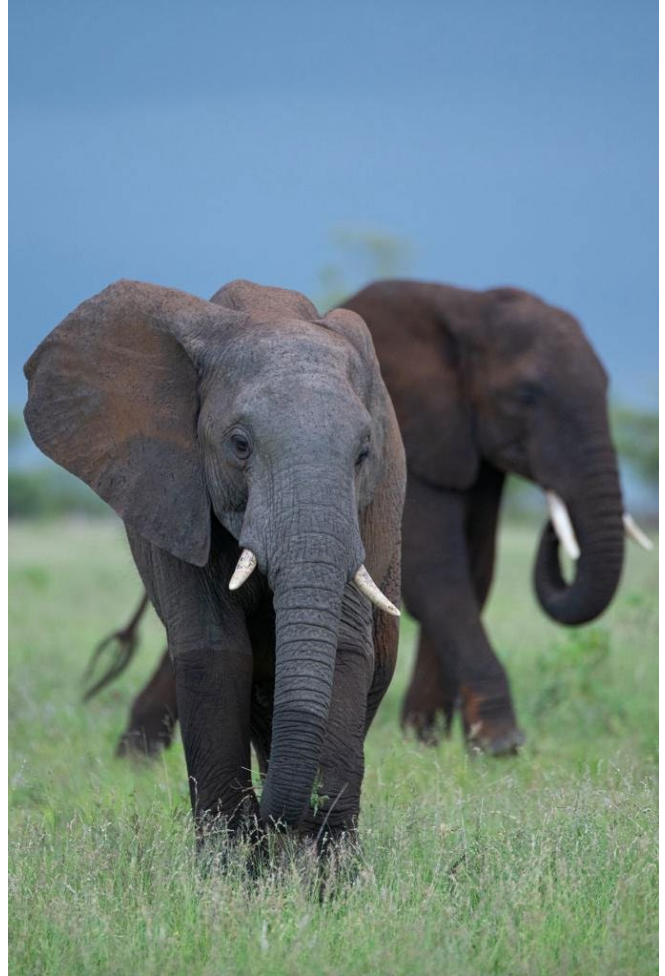
Moreover, the colour-changing ability is not only a product of external factors but also influenced by the chameleon's mood, temperature, and environment. This camouflage serves both defensive and predatory purposes, enabling the chameleon to blend seamlessly into its surroundings or convey complex messages to others of its species.

Observing these reptilian wonders provides a unique opportunity to witness the intricate behaviours and adaptations that contribute to their survival in the wild, making them a fascinating highlight for wildlife enthusiasts and visitors alike.

November Gallery



Monzo male leopard - Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Elephants – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



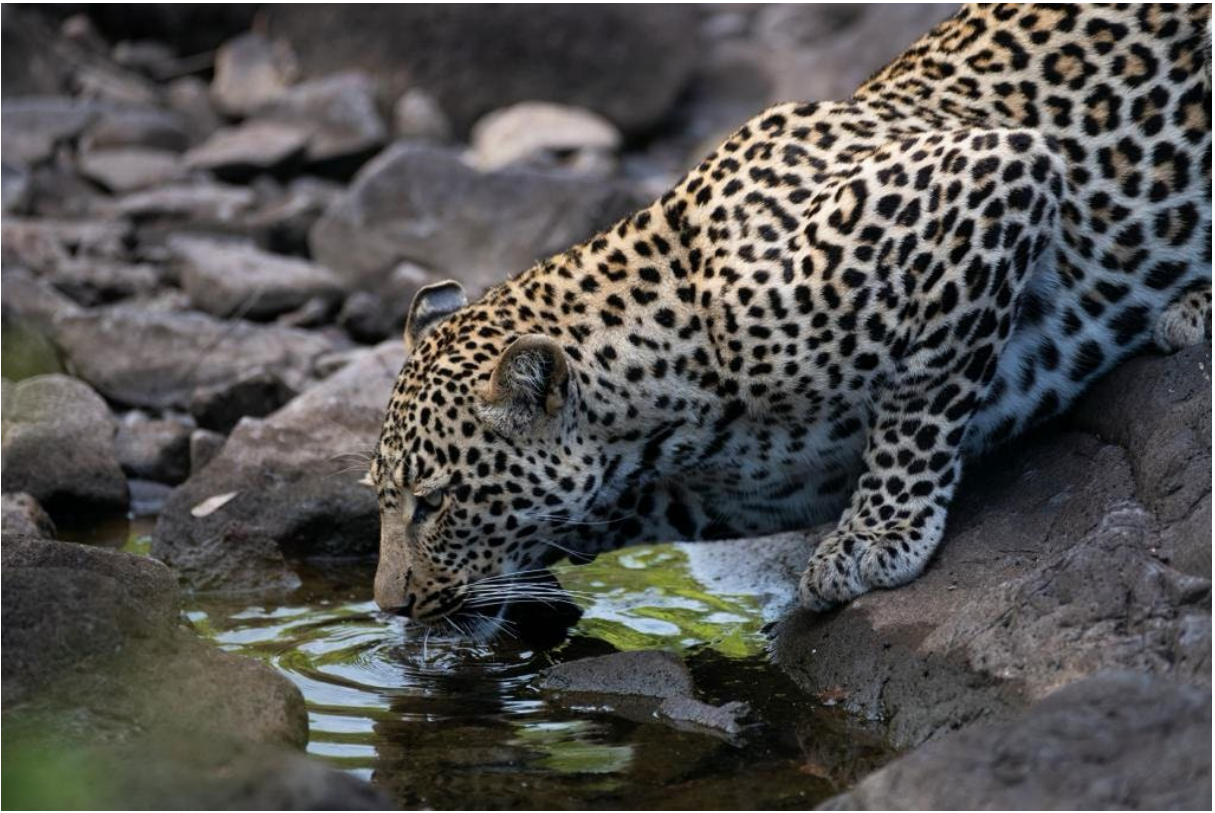
Mananga lioness with giraffe in the background – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Sunrise and the euphorbia - Photo by Brian Rode



Black-crowned night heron - Photo by Brian Rode



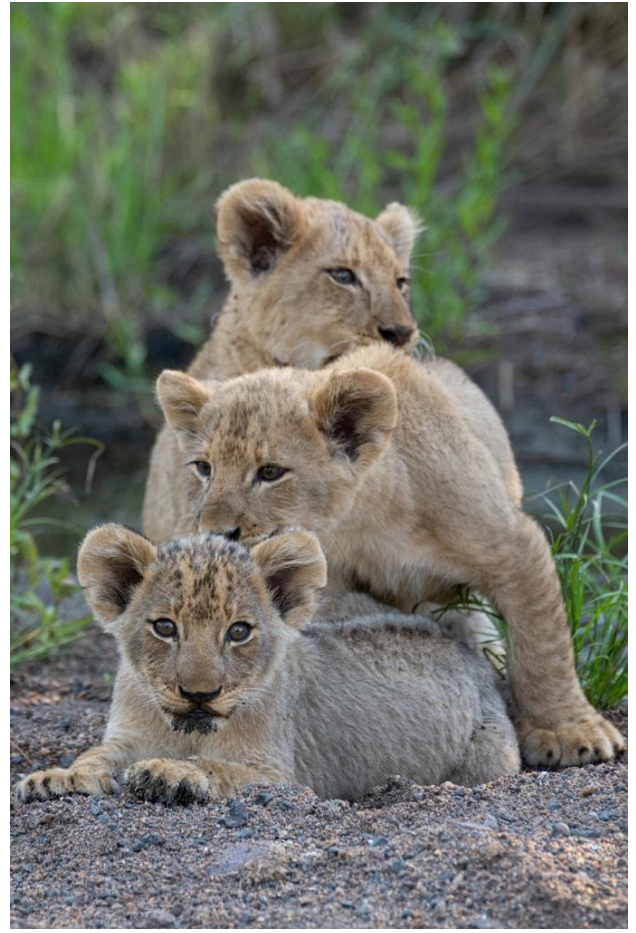
Dumbana 3:3 male leopard – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Trichard Male posing in the morning sun - Photo by Brian Rode



Leopard in a leadwood – Photo by Evidence Nkuna



Shish Pride cubs – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Buffalo bull – Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Elephant mud bathing– Photo by Rudi Hulshof



Freckled nightjar Photo By Brian Rode