

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 20.7°C (69.26°F)
Average maximum: 28.8°C (83.84°F)
Minimum recorded: 18.0°C (64.4°F)
Maximum recorded: 34.0°C (93.2°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 221mm
For the season to date: 453mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:19
Sunset: 18:49

As the hard rains fall and the banks of the Sand River begin to rise from edge to edge, the powerful flow of water takes over and thunders through the night. It is lush, it is wet and it is spectacular! The bushveld bellows utter beauty and continues to bring such life into this world. From the shrieking trumpets of little elephants, to the soft murmur of the cricket who calls in the grasslands, we begin this year with a fresh start. With the symbolic rain washing away the year gone by and a wonderful year in the wilderness to look forward to, we can only know that nature will continue to inspire us.

A sightings snapshot for January follows:

Lions

- This month has been one for the Plains Camp males when it comes to the lion dynamics on the property. These two males have gotten the year off to a great start, having mated with both of the Nkuhuma lionesses

and spending a large amount of time with the two of them, providing us with many great sightings of them interacting.

- The Nkuhuma lionesses remain on the property and seem to have made themselves at home. When not with the Plains Camp males, we have viewed these females hunting together and both feeding on several prey species. They are both in very good condition.
- It has been a quiet month for the Mhangene Pride who we have only seen on very few occasions earlier on in the month. We believe them to have moved into some of the southern portions of the reserve at this stage however, with youngsters in the pride and with pressure from the Nzenga males further south, we are sure they will be back soon.

Elephants

- Not a day goes by that we don't manage to see an elephant, these large pachyderms scatter the land, feeding from marula tree to marula tree as the succulent fruits begin to fall. Most prevalent are the bull elephants who seem to be around every corner, either mud wallowing after a long day in the sun, or eating their favourite sweet treats. With the start of a new year, it is always a welcomed sight to see the baby elephants within their herd, beginning a new life and exploring their new surroundings.

Leopards

- On the twentieth of January, one of our guides, Marc Eschenlohr, managed to capture a female leopard and her cub on his camera trap (trail camera) in the early hours of the morning. This footage was captured north of the river and directly north of the lodges which we believe to be the territory of the Serengeti female. It is to our understanding that she had been mating with the Hosana male last year and we estimate the cub to already be around 3-4 months old as it is moving around with its mother.
- The Schotia female has since revealed through more trail cam footage, to have given birth to two new cubs. She was seen moving both of her little fur balls from Ebony Lodge, up into the rocky outcrops behind Boulders Lodge. It won't be too long now before Schotia female brings them out to feed on their first carcass.
- This month, a firm favourite has been the Nkuwa female. In an area usually dominated by the Mobeni female, the Nkuwa female has made herself seemingly at home. It has become a habit for all of us guides to scan the marula trees within the area in hopes to find her lying in one – it seems like her favourite thing to do, and the way we find her on most occasions!

Buffalo

- January seems to be the month for males within the larger herbivore division, mostly finding bulls spending their time in mud wallows and feeding on the abundance of lush grasses. There have also been a few sightings of the larger herds to the south this month, with lions close on their trail.

Cheetah

- Rivalling our previous month, it seems as though the cheetah sightings have become a lot more regular on the property. This month we were treated to some incredible viewing of the female cheetah and her cub feeding on two different kills as well as witnessing the male cheetah pushing his strength to the limit as he gave full chase to a herd of impala. Although unsuccessful it was a privilege to watch!

Bird List

- The bird list for January totals 218 birds and includes specials of an African crane, a breeding pair of Kori bustards and half-collared kingfisher.

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

Symbiosis in the animal kingdom is well documented and is a prime example of how everything is connected in some way or another. Personally, it is one of the most fascinating aspects of the natural environment. Considering how many people share a passion for observing wildlife, it's not often you get to photograph a rare moment between two species which may well possibly be the only photo of such an interaction:

We found ourselves in the south of the reserve where we had been watching a rhino bull wallow in the mud. With the late afternoon light behind us, we waited for the large mammal to rise to his feet. This took some time. We couldn't help but do some birding while the rhino enjoyed his time in the mud. Three-banded plovers, wood sandpipers and common sandpipers were in our immediate vicinity.

Finally, the rhino rose to his feet and took a few steps while assessing the wind. Then, a bird appeared on his back. This one was different to what we are used to seeing on rhinos. A tail wagging, a white breast to belly and a long beak. On closer inspection it was the unmistakable common sandpiper which was hunting the swarm of flies on the rhino's back.

Usually we see oxpeckers, even starlings, on large mammals. In my seven-and-a-half-years of guiding I have been really fortunate to have been in areas with healthy rhino populations and this was a first for me. After doing some research, this behaviour has been documented just a few times by one person in the 1990s but they had no photos. This may be the only photo of this special symbiosis.



Nyelethi, the star of the show
(Nyelethi means “Star” in English.)

Article by Paul Josop

Patient in his attempt to hunt a herd of impala close to a clearing, the Nyelethi male leopard decided to cut his losses as the task looked near impossible due to the herd’s disposition. Avoiding detection by staying in the treeline and skulking from bush to bush, he walked away from the impala to try pursue his next meal in another area close by.



Following in the rain, we lost view of him as he patrolled through dense green bushwillows but soon re-emerged close to a prominent termite mound with a weeping boer-bean growing out of it. At this vantage point he sat down, looked into the distance for his favourite prey, but nothing was in sight.



We decided to temporarily leave the large feline in his quest to hunt, and collected Emmanuel Emman, who we had left on foot tracking Nyelethi before we found him with the vehicle. Returning to Nyelethi's last position he was no longer on site. Knowing his general direction, we assumed he was moving towards our airstrip where a large rank of impala often roam.



A couple of minutes later we found him again very close to the southern end of the airstrip. He was now stopping every few metres and listening to what sounded like impala ewes and lambs communicating. As he cut through the block to get a view of the unsuspecting antelopes, we decided to make our way to the road next to the runway and waited for him.

Hearing a sudden alarm call from what I thought was a grey duiker, the herd of impala gave an outburst of snorts! At this instant, Nyelethi ran out of the block, stuck right next to the treeline, and ran north towards the airstrip apron, where a Federal Airline aeroplane was parked! He stopped right on the edge of the apron close to the windsock and waited behind a large-fruited bushwillow. By this stage we had two safari vehicles in the sighting, an aeroplane with two pilots waiting for guests and our airstrip personnel watching a hunt come to fruition...

The impalas, now somewhat alert and unsure where the danger was coming from, started running north out of the dense treeline and towards the runway. Nyelethi, sublime in his approach, vanished for a split second and as the impala bolted past him, he struck, leaping into the herd, and easily caught a single impala lamb!

With the lamb dead, gripped in his jaws and the rest of the impala herd alarming frantically, Nyelethi decided to move behind the terminal building with his prize. All the commotion had attracted a hyena into the area, and this forced the Star to quickly hoist his kill in a marula tree.



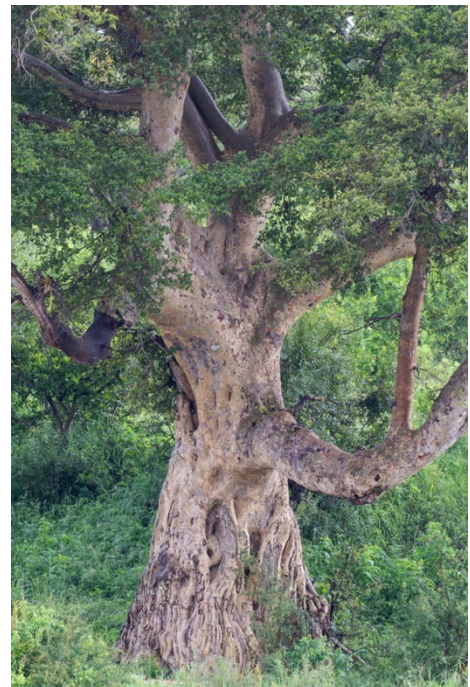
Photo credits: Adrian Steirn



Driving along the banks of the ever-impressive perennial Sand River, it's hard not to take note of the incredibly large trees that line the banks, trees that include jackalberries, Natal mahoganies and sausage trees. There, however, exists another tree species, one that is capable of reaching heights of up to 30 metres. Its yellowish - flakey bark, large green leaves and green tinged or reddish/orange fruits make the sycamore fig (*Ficus sycomorus*) a truly unique tree species.

Depending on conditions, these trees can live more than 200 years. Over the years holes form in their trunks and in turn provide homes for bats, tree squirrels, mice, snakes and other reptiles. It produces an abundance of fruit almost all year round. The prolific crop is an important source of nourishment, being eaten by a number of animal and bird species. Monkeys and baboons, birds such as African green pigeons, black-headed orioles and purple-crested turacos as well as bats eat the fruit directly from the branches, while antelope and warthogs devour what falls to the ground. The root system and buttressed trunk of this species, makes it relatively safe from being pushed over by elephants.

The flowers are tiny and are enclosed inside the fruits and are therefore never seen. It is inside these fruits that the survival of the fig and another species is ensured. These species cannot live apart from each other and so have an extremely important symbiotic relationship. Figs are pollinated by a highly specialized species of wasp (*Ceratosolen arabicus*) that breeds inside the figs. A pregnant female wasp leaves her natal fig through a tiny hole in the fruit, and flies to another tree, where she crawls in through the same



hole created by another wasp. While entering the fruit, she will transfer all the pollen from one flower to another, ensuring the survival of the tree. When she reaches the middle of the fruit, she will select a female flower in which to lay her eggs. After the larvae hatch, they eat the pulp of the fig and develop into adults. The males are wingless and will live their entire life cycle inside the fig. The male will pierce a small hole through the fig to reach a female where he will fertilize her and die shortly afterwards. She then leaves the fig, and the cycle continues. The gases released while the wasps are inside the figs prevent the fig from ripening, so these green fruits are ignored and not eaten, which ensures the process can be completed.



The Nile crocodile

Article by Sipho Sibuyi

Nile crocodile are ancient animals having evolved some 60 million years ago. They are one of Africa's best known reptiles and you can often see them in the river in front of our lodges, Ebony and Boulders. The Sand River has this reptile thriving between its banks.

The crocodile has short legs and a big scaly powerful tail. The nostrils, eyes and ears are situated on top of its head, while the rest of the body remains concealed under water. They hunt, especially at night in summer months, and in winter are less energetic. They are mostly active at night and when it comes to breeding, the females lays from 50 to 70 eggs on dry ground close to the river. She will lie on top of the of the nest to keep the eggs warm and guard them against predators, such as water monitor lizards, who eat the eggs. When the eggs hatch she carries the babies, by her mouth, to the water and she will stay close to protect them for an extended period.

Their main diet is fish but they are capable of using speed and their large jaws to grab, hold and drown large prey like wildebeest and zebra.

Male crocodiles are territorial and defend and patrol their area along the river bank. Courtship displays include head-slaps on the water, snapping their jaws and occasionally vocalizing (bellowing).

January Gallery





