

Singita



Photo by Danelle Ferreira

WILDLIFE JOURNAL SINGITA SABI SAND, SOUTH AFRICA For the month of May, 2026

Temperature

Average minimum: 14.9°C (58.8°F)
Minimum recorded: 10.0°C (50.0°F)
Average maximum: 25.4°C (77.7°F)
Maximum recorded: 30.0°C (86.0°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 19.2mm
Season to date: 567.2mm
(*Season = Oct to Sep)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:23
Sunset: 17:18

The month of May marks the beginning of the dry winter season, bringing with it crisp, misty mornings that melt into clear, warm afternoons. As the vegetation thins and waterholes dry, wildlife gathers around the more permanent sources of water, offering spectacular opportunities to spot the reserves famous leopards, prides of lions and large breeding herds of elephants. Hot water bottles and heated seats make the early mornings very cosy, and accompanied with a hot drink, it's so much better than a sofa safari.

An overview of May's sightings follow:

Elephants

- Roadblocks aplenty for the month of May! The guiding team is constantly having to remove debris off the road from the night before, as elephants leave behind very clear signs and very large roadblocks in the form of branches and pushed over trees.

Buffalos

- Large herds still roam the southern grasslands, with a number of different lion prides and coalitions in pursuit of the larger prey species. Like clockwork, high tea at Ebony Lodge sees the resident buffalo bull. Guide, Daniel Hartmann, writes about the herd of buffalo in this month's article.

Lions

- The Mhangeni Pride is looking strong with their four cubs, and they were all recently seen on a buffalo kill. Two of the older lionesses also appear to be pregnant so we are expecting some new whiskered faces soon.
- The Tsalala lioness has four cubs around the two-month mark! We are excited to see them grow up. They are still in the rocky outcrops not far from Boulders Lodge.
- The Nkumati males continue to harass the large herds of buffalo. They are now back with the Mhangeni Pride and more vocal than ever. They were also seen mating with one of the Bateleur Pride lionesses.
- The Othawa Pride were seen just north of the river one morning, and all their cubs are looking very healthy.
- The Plains Camp males have been very vocal of late, in and around the Sand River in the early hours of the morning. Their roars make that first sip of coffee that much more exciting.

Leopards

- The Thamba male leopard has been seen across most of the Singita property, he recently claimed one of the Nkuwa female's kills, close to Castleton.
- The Nkuwa female and her young male cub have spent some time apart from each other. Maybe she's giving him a valuable life lesson in doing so as he needs to learn to catch prey for himself, albeit a scrub hare or game bird.
- Both the Xiluva and Xihangu female have been seen regularly, and close to the lodges. The Xihangu female was seen feeding on a giraffe that had died of natural causes.
- The Hlambela male has been seen again in the north, now that our river crossing has been redone after the heavy rainy season. He was with two females, and we are not quite sure of their identities.
- Two very small cubs have also been seen in the northern part of the property; we assume them to be the Serengeti female's offspring.

Cheetah

- The Makatini female cheetah has been seen in the southern grasslands of the Sabi Sands. Although she was full from an impala she managed to catch, her rounded belly makes us suspect she may be pregnant which is very exciting news.
- The male cheetah has also been seen sporadically throughout the southern grassland sections of the reserve.

African wild dogs

- The wild dog pack that we typically see, the Othawa Pack, are currently denning in the western sector of the Sabi Sands. We have had a lone male, perhaps a dispersing pack member, that has been seen around Castleton on several occasions this month.

Unusual sightings

- While spending time with the Thamba male leopard walking past the Singita deliveries sign, a group of guests sat patiently waiting for him to walk down the road towards them. While waiting, a rustle in the vegetation nearby led them to discovering a pangolin – talk about luck.
- Guide, Lucy Stofberg, and her guests were treated to a very special sighting of a serval and her two sub-adult young.

Bird list

- We have added another four birds to our list for the year; two specials include the white-backed night heron and the violet-eared waxbill. This takes the year's tally to 275.

Some Bush Stories follow, as well as the images for the May Gallery.

Leopard vs otters: a morning to remember

By Danelle Ferreira

On a recent cloudy morning game drive, one of the guide and tracker teams spotted the Nkuwa female leopard and her sub-adult son, who is about a year old. More than one leopard in a sighting is always exciting, however no-one could have expected what they were to encounter in the Mobeni drainage that they were heading to.

One of our guides, Jason, recounts what he and tracker Renneck, and their guests, saw responding to this sighting. As they got to the area of Fireguard and the Mobeni drainage, they saw a Cape clawless otter running towards one of the deep puddles.

The otter jumped into the puddle, immediately catching the attention of the young male leopard. Otters can be dangerous with their sharp canine teeth. The inexperienced young male leopard kept running around the edge of the water trying to get to it. Eventually his curiosity got the best of him, and he decided to head into the water to get to the otter. The otter, in turn, seemed to be enticing the leopard, swimming towards it and away again. The otter jumped out of the water, much to the young male's frustration, as he had to run around to the opposite side of the puddle. This back and forth continued for about 20 minutes, until the leopard got intrigued by a catfish in the water, that he eventually ended up catching.

Unexpected interactions between two species like these serve as a reminder that the African bush is never predictable. While leopards might be the apex predator, the agility and boldness of the otter proved that even a youthful hunter can be out maneuvered in the right environment. Ultimately, the young male's shift from otter to catfish showed a crucial step in his development: learning to weigh the risk of a fight against the reward of a meal. It was a rare glimpse into the complex, often playful, and always high-stakes drama that unfolds when two different worlds collide in the Sabi Sands.



Young male leopard and Cape clawless otter. By Jason Gibson.

African science

By Andries Mohlala

More modern medicine is consumed in Africa today than the traditional medicines that our population used to use centuries ago. Some still prefer traditional medicine, but Western medicine takes the preference because of availability, convenience and fewer side effects. Traditional healers and elders are those who are still trying to remind the younger generations that traditions and traditional medicine are still vital in community building and health.

Babies are born with fontanelles (commonly called 'soft spots') they are tough, flexible, fibrous membranes connecting the incompletely formed skull bones of a newborn. Based on local beliefs and myth, fontanelles need to be attended to by the elders because, in their experience, they can grow all the way to the forehead and between the eyes which would result in lack of brain development. Also, the baby's stomach gets too big resulting in skinny legs and lack of proper growth, which leads to deformity and many different disabilities.

Septic weed (scientifically known as *Senna occidentalis* and commonly called coffee senna or coffee weed) is a plant that grows in the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve, and it is one of the plants that still play a pivotal role in communities outside of the reserve.

Traditional healers and elders will dig the roots of the septic weed plant, as well as the roots of the monkey orange plant, and boil them together until a dark brown decoction is extracted. Once it has cooled off, a newborn gets a teaspoon measurement once a day. It is thought to help with the fast development of the bone structures of the fontanelles, and the gut-activation process. It is believed that the fontanelles can develop naturally but people prefer to have control and making sure that the process takes place without any complications.

For many local people trees and plants are protected for medicinal use. They are harvested in summer for use as it becomes difficult to identify them during winter or droughts.

Rivers of black

By Daniel Hartman

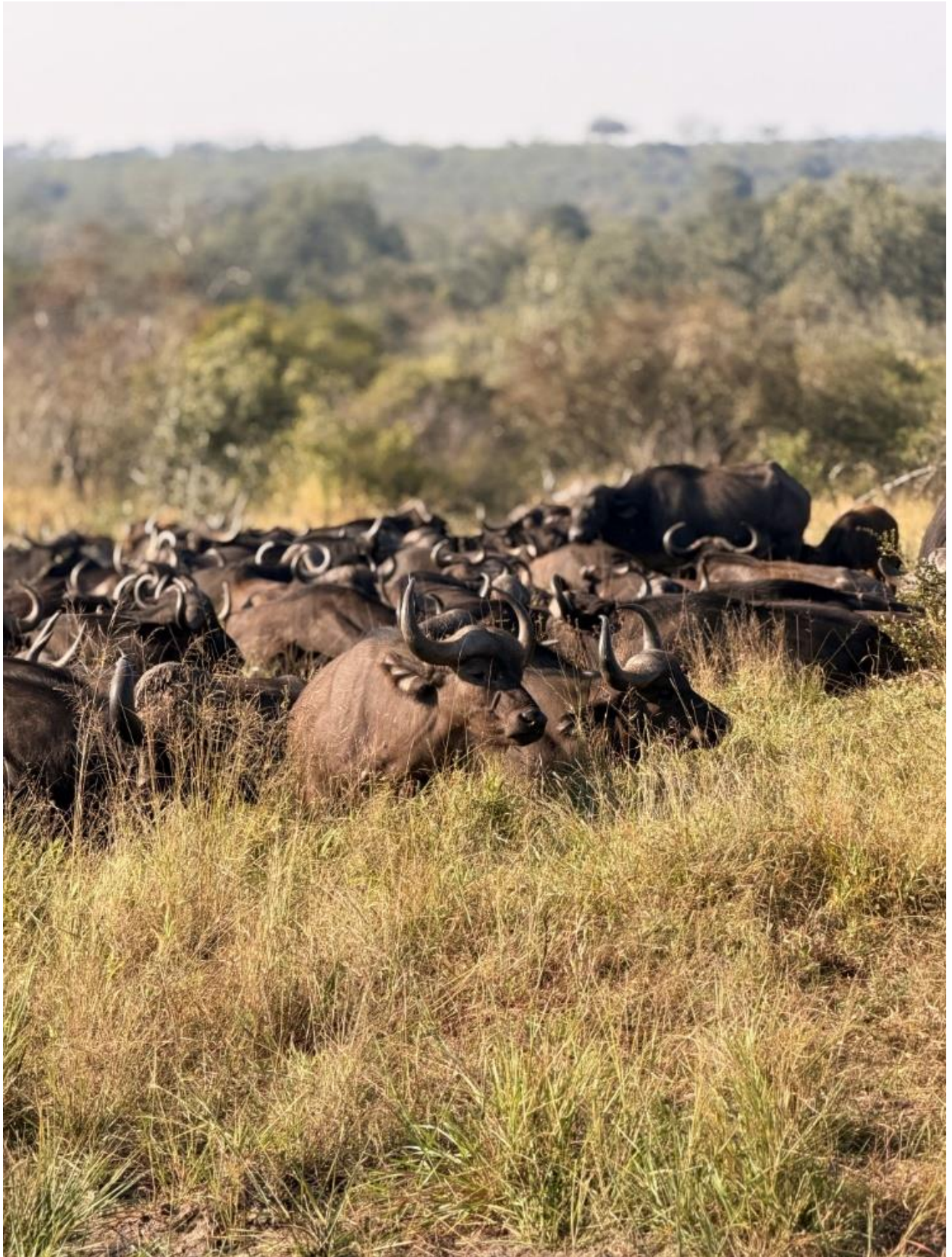
There are moments in the Sabi Sand when the bush seems to pause. The francolins fall silent, impala lift their heads in unison, and a faint tremor begins to pulse through the earth beneath your feet. Long before they are seen, they are felt.

Then comes the dust.

It rises first above the knobthorns and marulas like smoke from a distant fire. Slowly, dark shapes begin to materialise beneath it. What appears at first to be a scattered collection of animals soon reveals itself as something far grander – a living current flowing through the landscape. Hundreds upon hundreds of Cape buffalo moving with a sense of purpose known only to them.

To witness one of the great buffalo herds of Singita Sabi Sand is to observe one of Africa's oldest rhythms still playing out exactly as it has for thousands of years.

Cape buffalo are among the most influential large herbivores in the region. Living in complex social groups that can number from a few dozen individuals to several hundred, they move across the landscape in response to changing forage availability, water access and seasonal conditions. Their collective behaviour reflects a



constant balancing of nutritional needs, predator risk and the demands of reproduction, making herd movements an important driver of ecological processes throughout the reserve.

Their movements are seldom random. Guided by water, grazing quality, breeding cycles and seasonal pressures, these immense herds drift across the reserve like weather systems. In summer they spread across nutrient-rich grasslands, feeding on the flush of green growth brought by the rains. During the harsher winter months, they draw closer to permanent water sources, carving dark pathways through the pale, dust-covered landscape as they travel between grazing grounds and the life-giving waters of the Sand River.

From above, their movement resembles a river. Individual animals weave, merge and separate before dissolving back into the greater mass. Old bulls move with deliberate weight, their scarred bosses bearing the marks of countless seasons. Calves dart between mothers while oxpeckers rise and settle in restless waves overhead.

Yet their significance extends far beyond the spectacle. Every passage leaves its mark. By grazing intensively on older grasses, buffalo help stimulate fresh growth, while their hooves press seeds into the soil and aid regeneration when the rains return. These changes ripple through the ecosystem, creating grazing opportunities for species such as white rhino, opening hunting grounds for cheetahs, and influencing a wide range of smaller animals, insects and ground-nesting birds.

Of course, where buffalo gather, predators are rarely far behind.

Lions monitor these vast congregations closely. The sheer biomass of a large herd is too valuable to ignore, and entire pride movements can be shaped by its presence. During the dry season, when resources concentrate around water, dramatic encounters unfold as lions attempt to isolate vulnerable individuals from the herd's protection. Few sights in Africa rival the tension. The air thickens with anticipation. Buffalo bunch together, heads lowered and horns angled forward. Lions position themselves carefully, searching for weakness. Every movement is measured; every decision carries consequence. In these moments, the ancient relationship between hunter and hunted reveals itself in its purest form.

Yet some of the most memorable sightings occur not during a hunt, but in the quiet hours of late afternoon.

As the sun begins its descent, the herd often makes its final journey toward water. Dust hangs in shafts of golden light while silhouettes drift across the horizon in an endless procession. The low grunts of cows calling to calves mingle with the chatter of oxpeckers and the steady rhythm of thousands of hooves. For a brief moment, the landscape belongs entirely to them.

Standing amid such a spectacle, one gains a deeper appreciation for the scale and complexity of this ecosystem. Buffalo are not merely inhabitants of the Sabi Sand; they help shape it, influencing vegetation, predator movements and countless ecological processes through their continual passage.

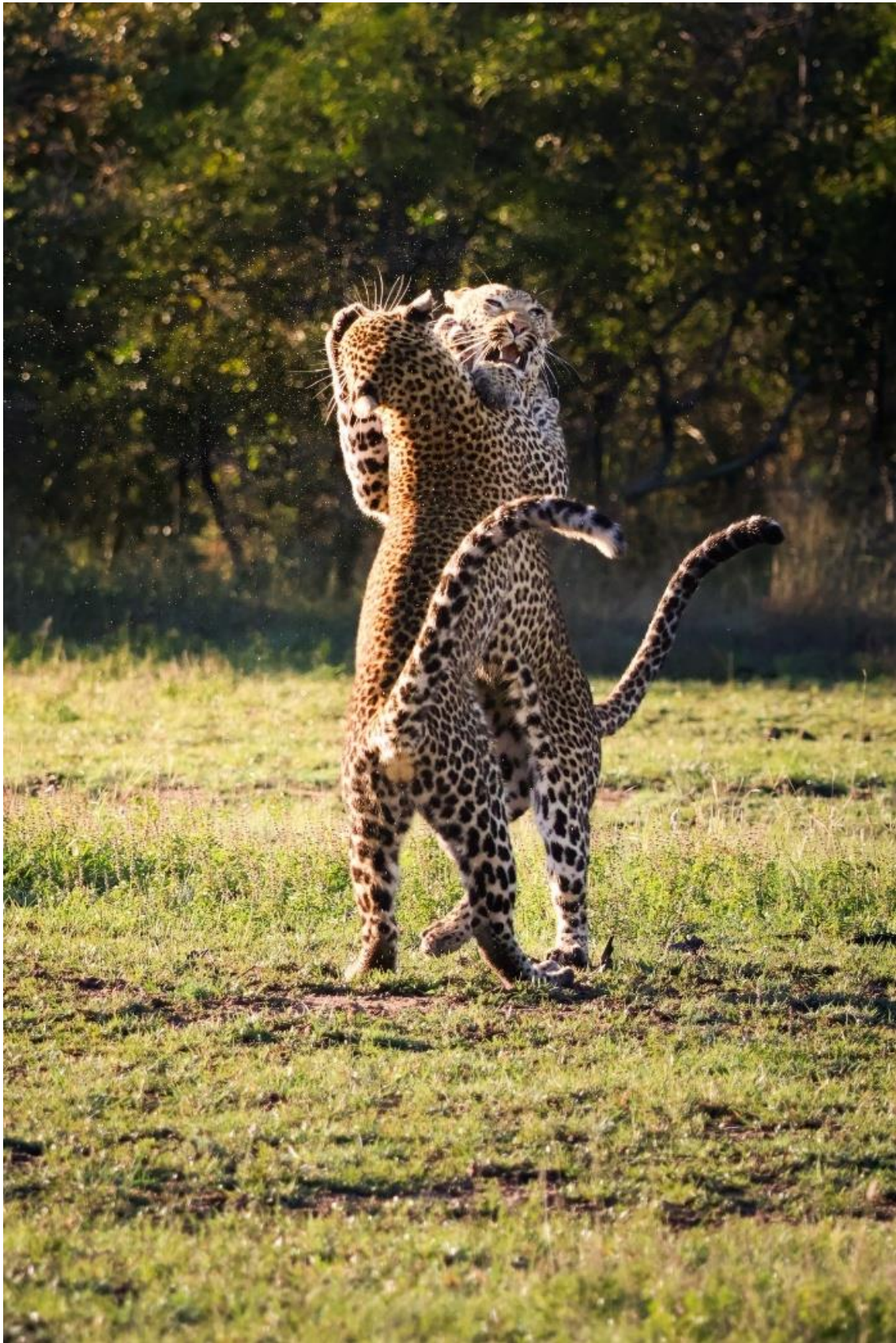
The herds remind us that wilderness is never static. It shifts, adapts and responds. Few creatures embody that perpetual motion more completely than the dark rivers of buffalo that continue to roam the plains and woodlands of Singita Sabi Sand.

May Gallery



A precious moment of a white rhino and her calf.
The white zebra foal, a once in a lifetime sighting. By Marc Bowes Taylor.





The Nkuwa female leopard and her mischievous cub playing. By Jason Gipson.

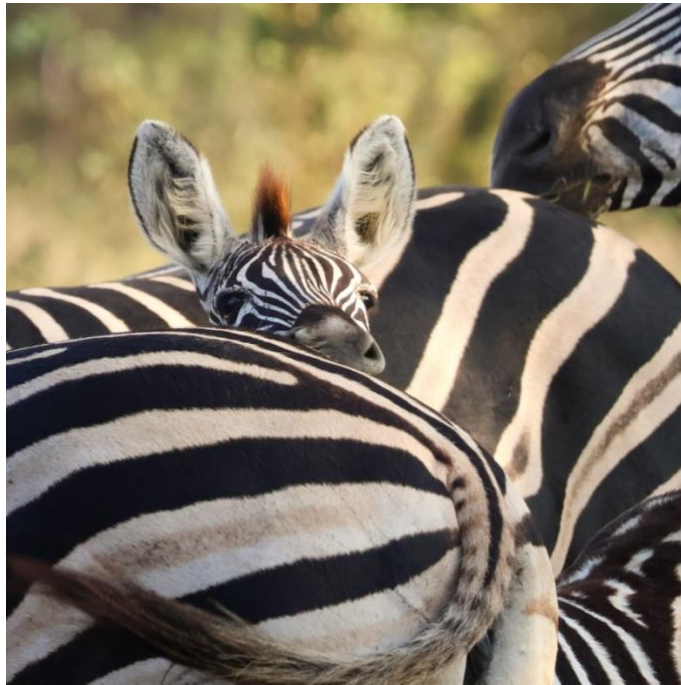


A new addition at the hyena den.
An intense stare from one of the Mhangeni lionesses. By Jason Gipson.





A picturesque winter's morning scene with a tower of giraffe. By Jason Gibson



A young zebra foal sneaking a pose. By Jason Gibson.
Winter dew highlighting some of the smaller safari details. By Marc Bowes-Taylor.

