

Singita



N'wanetsi River a few days after the flood – Photo by Monika Malewski

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

Temperature

Average minimum: 21.5°C (70.7°F)
Minimum recorded: 20.0°C (68.0°F)
Average maximum: 28.9°C (84.0°F)
Maximum recorded: 37.0°C (98.6°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 680mm
Season to date: 861 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sept)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05h30
Sunset: 19h00

January 2026 will be remembered as a truly historic month for South Africa and for the Kruger National Park. An extraordinary convergence of weather systems from the south and east formed a powerful low-pressure system, delivering almost two weeks of relentless rainfall across the region. The northern reaches of Kruger were the hardest hit, with several camps evacuated as rivers burst their banks and floodwaters surged through the landscape. In some areas, lodges built close to river edges experienced water levels rising alarmingly high, in places nearing ceiling height. Within the Singita concession, Lebombo and Sweni were fortunate to escape with minimal issues, although water levels rose to record heights and access was temporarily restricted.

As the N'wanetsi River finally began to subside, it revealed a landscape dramatically reshaped by the force of the water. Where steep banks and dense fever-berry thickets once lined the river's edge, wide open sandbanks now stretch out, with little vegetation remaining nearby. Entire trees were swept away, and the only evidence of the torrent that rushed through hours before lies in the grass and debris tangled high in the remaining

branches. Flooding is not unfamiliar to natural systems, and many animals instinctively respond by moving to higher ground. While there were inevitably some casualties - particularly among newborn mammals, birds and insects - this is nature's cycle, where resilience and adaptation prevail.

Exploring the concession again has been both challenging and exhilarating. River crossings are unrecognisable, roads have been damaged or erased, and each drive brings moments of possibly getting stuck, getting unstuck, and carefully reopening access where possible. The Xinkelegane drainage, which usually flows only briefly after heavy rain, has been running steadily since the 15th of January, continuing to feed the N'wanetsi and push water past our lodges. The areas we have managed to reach so far have quite literally left us speechless, and we are excited to witness how this powerful event will shape the months to come.

A Sightings Snapshot for January follows:

Lions

- The Shish Pride – This pride has only been seen on the outskirts of our concession, primarily around H6 and S37 near the N'wanetsi picnic site. On one occasion, the short-maned male was observed. We are uncertain about the status of the female, who was last seen with visible suckling marks the previous month. She was seen toward the Granophyre's area then; however, due to the heavy rainfall, we have not yet been able to cross any of the rivers to follow up on her movements.
- The Sonop males – These males were seen only during the first week of the month. On one fortunate afternoon, they managed to chase a leopard off its kill. Otherwise, they have been observed patrolling the western boundary of our concession, advertising their presence not only through frequent scent marking but also by stopping regularly to roar. As the air cools in the late afternoon and evening, their deep, guttural calls carry even further across the landscape.
- The Mananga Pride – Just as the first heavy rains began, the Mananga Pride was seen moving steadily south from the north. They eventually reached the Ntsibistane drainage line, where they turned east and moved up into the mountains.
- After the 15th of the month, drainage lines, normally dry depressions, and our major rivers began to rise significantly. This restricted our movements to the tarred roads within the Kruger National Park. Despite these limitations, we were fortunate to see Casper, the white lion born on our concession in 2014, who has since established territory around the Satara region. We also observed the N'wanetsi male and the Chava male west of the Shishangaan waterhole. These males had moved through our concession at the beginning of 2025 but disappeared as the Sonop males expanded their territory across our concession.

Leopards

- This month's leopard sightings were dominated by females, with the Khandziya female being the most prominent. This beautiful young female is thriving along the N'wanetsi River between Dave's Crossing and Green-apple Hill. The area offers an ideal habitat, with numerous tall trees, deep ravines, rocky outcrops, and an abundance of game to meet all her needs. As this region forms part of her mother's established territory, she is also afforded a level of protection from other territorial females that could otherwise pose a threat. This security, combined with the rich and varied landscape, appears to be allowing her to settle well and flourish in the area.

African wild dogs

- African wild dogs have been a particular highlight recently, with two packs viewed regularly in the immediate area around the lodges and along the H6. One pack, numbering twelve individuals, includes a collared member, part of an ongoing monitoring programme run by Kruger National Park in collaboration with several non-profit organisations, including the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT).

Through GPS collaring and detailed sighting records, these partnerships help track movements, pack dynamics, and survival rates of this endangered species across South Africa. The presence of lodges such as Singita within the park greatly enhances these efforts, as frequent and reliable sightings by guides contribute valuable data and allow for more effective monitoring, ultimately aiding conservation outcomes. The second pack, made up of three adults and six fast-growing pups, has delighted guests with phenomenal viewing, including playful scenes of the pups wallowing in muddy puddles and thrilling hunting displays as the pack targets impala - an encouraging sign of a healthy and active family group.

Elephants

- Elephant sightings this month have been nothing short of exceptional, with the herds seemingly unfazed by the persistent rains. Where other species may be slowed or displaced, elephants thrive under these conditions, needing to travel far less in search of essential nutrients as water is abundant across the landscape. With marula trees in full fruit, food is plentiful, and the bush feels rich and alive - making it a particularly good time to be an elephant. Massive bulls, some in musth, have been a frequent highlight, slowly trudging along with an unmistakable presence, their great heads gently bobbing up and down while their trunks sway rhythmically from side to side as they move through the soaked terrain.

Spotted hyenas

- Hyena sightings this month have been particularly interesting, as observations shifted away from the more common encounters with solitary, wandering individuals to sightings of entire clans moving together. On several occasions, groups of up to eight hyenas were seen roaming around the Dumbana Rocks, noses to the ground as they followed scent trails in looping, purposeful patterns. Encouragingly, the well-known clan along the H6, made up of multiple generations and several young cubs, has endured the heavy rains. Their original den, located in a culvert beneath the tarred H6 road, remained intact long enough for the older, more experienced females to relocate their cubs westward to a safer, drier den-site - demonstrating both their adaptability and maternal foresight in challenging conditions.

Buffalos

- Large herds of buffalo have been roaming the central regions of the Kruger, moving steadily across the open grasslands as they feed on the lush, sweet grasses brought on by the seasonal rains. Their presence has been widespread, with the herds taking full advantage of the abundant grazing conditions available in these open areas. All buffalo sightings recorded this month occurred during the period when our concession was flooded. As a result, our explorations took us further south toward the Tshokwane area, where these impressive herds were most frequently encountered.

Plains game

- Relentless flooding across the plains of the Kruger National Park has left soils deeply saturated, creating ideal conditions for bacterial hoof diseases and soft, unstable terrain that takes a toll on many of the park's large ungulates. While detailed veterinary surveys of hoof-rot-like conditions in wild African ungulates aren't as widely documented as in domestic livestock, browser and grazer species with heavy reliance on firm ground - such as impala (*Aepyceros melampus*), Burchell's zebra (*Equus quagga burchellii*), blue wildebeest (*Connochaetes taurinus*), kudu (*Tragelaphus strepsiceros*), and other antelope - are vulnerable to interdigital infections and foot lesions when they stand for prolonged periods in muddy conditions, much like foot rot in domestic ruminants where bacteria such as *Dichelobacter nodosus* and *Fusobacterium necrophorum* flourish in moist soils. With the grass now exceptionally long and swamps expanded by the rains, we're seeing impala, zebra, wildebeest and various antelope species spending more time on the firmer road surfaces to ease pressure on irritated

hooves and to better spot predators. The tall grass also provides excellent stalking cover for lions, leopards and wild dogs, increasing predation risk in the flooded savanna and reinforcing why many plains game are lingering in the openness of the roads

Birds

- In recent weeks our concession has been transformed by the arrival of red-billed quelea in their hundreds of thousands, an awe-inspiring spectacle that signals another dynamic chapter in the seasonal rhythms of the bush. These highly nomadic birds move constantly in response to rainfall and the availability of grass seeds, their feeding habits dictating vast movements across the landscape. We have been fortunate to host nesting quelea on our concession for the past few years, and this year is no exception. They have once again settled into the knob-thorn thickets along the granophyre ridge just north of our lodges, where the air thrums with sound and motion. The nesting colonies have turned the area into a hub of activity, attracting a diverse cast of predators - eagles circling overhead, snakes slipping through the branches, and various mammals drawn in by the abundance of birds, eggs, and newly hatched chicks - creating a vivid and ever-unfolding wildlife drama.



Baboons enjoying the new sandbank across the way from Lebombo – Photo by Monika Malewski

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

January in the N’wanetsi Concession brings a gentle but profound transformation. Set within the Lowveld, this landscape is shaped by warm summers and rainfall drawn inland from the Indian Ocean. These summer rains recharge the soils and, almost overnight, the bushveld responds with a vibrant display of wildflowers. For a short window each year, colour returns to the plains and woodlands, revealing plants that are rich in both ecological and cultural meaning.

Wandering Jew (Commelina livingstonei)

The Wandering Jew is a subtle but striking presence in the summer veld, its vivid blue flowers appearing along shaded paths and drainage lines after the rains. Like many members of the *Commelina* genus - often referred to as “dayflowers” - its blooms are short-lived, opening during the day and lasting only briefly before fading, sometimes within hours. This ephemeral flowering strategy is well suited to the Lowveld summer, conserving energy while still attracting pollinators. Locally, related *Commelina* species have been used as leafy vegetables and in traditional remedies for skin and eye irritations.



String-of-stars (Heliotropium steudneri)

Heliotropium steudneri is a quiet but resilient presence in the Lowveld summer veld, favouring open, sandy soils and dry bushveld after the rains. Its slender stems carry narrow, softly hairy leaves and elongated clusters of small white to cream flowers, often overlooked in favour of more colourful blooms. In parts of Limpopo and the broader Lowveld, plants within the *Heliotropium* genus have been known to feature in traditional practices, where leaf infusions were sometimes used in remedies for minor stomach ailments or fevers. Such uses were guided by local knowledge and careful preparation, as some heliotropes are known to contain toxic compounds if misused.





Hoary peas (*Tephrosia* spp.)

The tiny pink flowers of hoary peas add a soft blush to the summer veld, often carpeting disturbed ground and open areas. As members of the legume family, these plants play a valuable ecological role by fixing nitrogen in the soil, improving fertility for surrounding grasses and herbs. Traditionally, some *Tephrosia* species have been used by local communities as natural fish poisons or insect deterrents - knowledge that reflects a deep understanding of plant chemistry and careful, situational use.

Wild jasmine (*Jasminum multipartum*)

Wild jasmine brings a quieter kind of beauty to the summer landscape, often noticed first by scent rather than sight. Its star-shaped white flowers release a soft, sweet fragrance in the warm evenings, drifting through the Lowveld after the rains. Traditionally, jasmine species have been valued for their calming properties, and while *Jasminum multipartum* is not widely cultivated for perfume, its flowers have been used locally in simple infusions associated with relaxation and well-being. In the veld, it provides nectar for insects and adds a sensory richness to N'wanetsi's summer nights, reminding us that not all wildflowers announce themselves in bold colour - some are felt more than seen.



Blue pea flower (*Clitoria ternatea*)

Few wildflowers capture attention as immediately as the blue pea flower, with its deep, velvety blue petals that seem almost unreal against the greens of the rainy season. Beyond its beauty, this plant has a rich cultural history: the flowers have been traditionally used to create natural blue dyes and herbal teas, known for their colour-changing properties when mixed with citrus. In the wild, the flower is an important nectar source for insects, while its climbing habit allows it to weave through surrounding vegetation, adding depth and texture to the summer tapestry of N'wanetsi.

Wild foxglove (*Sesamum trilobum*)

The wild foxglove introduces height and structure to the wildflower display, sending up tall spikes of tubular flowers in shades of pale pink to mauve. These blooms are especially attractive to carpenter bees and honeybees, which feed on their nectar. Like its temperate relatives, the plant is toxic if ingested, reinforcing the importance of traditional knowledge and respect for potentially dangerous but beautiful species.



Poison apple (*Solanum aculeastrum*)

Easily recognized by its spiny stems, purple flowers, and small bright yellow, tomato-like fruits, poison apple is both striking and deceptive. The fruits are highly toxic, yet the plant holds an important place in traditional medicine, where knowledgeable healers have used carefully prepared extracts for ailments such as skin infections and toothache. Its bold colours and sharp defences serve as clear warnings in the wild.



As the season matures and the rains begin to ease, these wildflowers will fade back into the soil, leaving behind seeds that wait patiently for the next summer.

Witnessing the birth and growth of baby impalas

Article by Evidence Nkuna

In Kruger National Park, one of Africa's premier wildlife reserves, the arrival of baby impalas marks one of the most enchanting seasonal spectacles. Known as lambs or fawns (though technically calves in antelope terminology), these newborns appear in large numbers during the early summer rainy season, transforming the savanna into a nursery of spotted, wobbly-legged youngsters. Impalas, among the most abundant and graceful antelopes in the park, reproduce together in a short space of time to maximize survival in a predator-rich environment.

The story begins with mating, or the rut, which peaks from May to June toward the end of the dry season. Dominant rams establish territories and herd females, engaging in dramatic displays, roaring, and clashing horns to secure breeding rights. After successful conception, the gestation period lasts approximately 194–200 days (about 6.5 months). This fixed timeline ensures most births coincide with the onset of the wet season, typically from late October through December, when fresh green grass erupts across Kruger's landscapes. This "impala lambing season" sees up to 80–90% of pregnant ewes giving birth within a narrow window of three to five weeks, creating a predator-satiation strategy - overwhelming lions, leopards, hyenas, cheetahs, and wild dogs with so many vulnerable targets that many lambs survive.

When labour approaches, the ewe separates from the herd, seeking a secluded spot in tall grass or dense bush for privacy and protection. Birth is swift: the single calf (twins are extremely rare) emerges quickly, often within minutes. The newborn, weighing around 4–6 kg, is remarkably precocial - its muscles are well-developed from the long gestation, allowing it to stand and wobble on spindly legs within 15–30 minutes. The mother licks it vigorously to clean amniotic fluids, stimulate breathing, and imprint her scent, while the fawn nurses colostrum-rich milk almost immediately for vital antibodies.



Impala – Photo by Monika Malewski

For the first few days to weeks, the hiding phase is critical. The lamb remains concealed in vegetation. It lies motionless for hours while the mother feeds nearby and returns periodically to nurse and groom it. This “hider” strategy, common in many antelopes, reduces predation risk during the most vulnerable period when it cannot yet outrun threats.

Growth accelerates rapidly. By 1–2 weeks, the lamb begins following its mother for short distances, its legs strengthening and coordination improving. Nursing continues for 4–6 months, though solid foraging starts early as the lamb nibbles tender shoots. Around 3–4 weeks, many lambs join “creches” - nursery groups where several lambs gather under the watchful eyes of one or two adult females acting as babysitters. This allows mothers to graze farther afield while the young gain social skills and safety in numbers. Playful behaviours emerge: bounding, pronging (high leaps with stiff legs), and mock chases that build agility essential for evading predators.

By 3–6 months males develop small horn buds, which grow into the elegant, lyre-shaped horns characteristic of rams. Weaning occurs around 6 months, though some continue nursing sporadically. Juveniles reach sexual maturity at about 1–2 years - ewes often breeding in their second year, while young rams may wait longer due to competition from dominant males.

In Kruger, this cycle supports the park’s high impala density, often called the “McDonald’s of the bush” for their role as prey. Yet, survival isn’t guaranteed - predation, especially during the hiding phase, claims many. Those that make it contribute to resilient herds that browse bushes, grasses, and shrubs, aiding vegetation dynamics and sustaining the food web.

Witnessing impala births and growth in Kruger - whether a hidden lamb suddenly rising, or a creche of frolicking lambs, is a highlight for visitors. It underscores the park’s thriving ecosystem, where timing, camouflage, and communal care turn fragile newborns into fleet-footed adults, embodying the wild rhythm of southern Africa’s premier reserve.

January Gallery



Left: Dumbana rocks, once the river had subsided. Note the debris half way up the tree.

Below: Panoramic view of the N'wanetsi River over Dumbana rocks once the river had subsided.

Bottom: Panoramic view of Dumbana rocks in January 2023 after the heavy rains. Note the amount of vegetation in the river that was destroyed by the water this year compared to 2023, as well as the along the river bank.



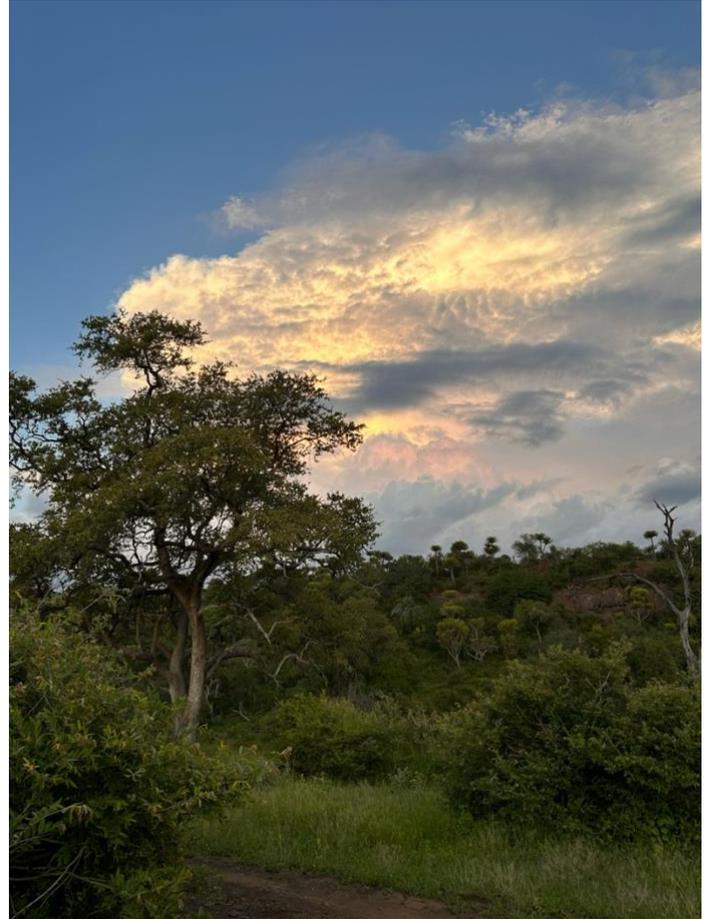


Left: Xingwenyana crossing 2023 Right: Xingwenyana crossing 2026 – Photos by Monika Malewski
What used to be 2G's bridge, now underwater – Photo by Monika Malewski





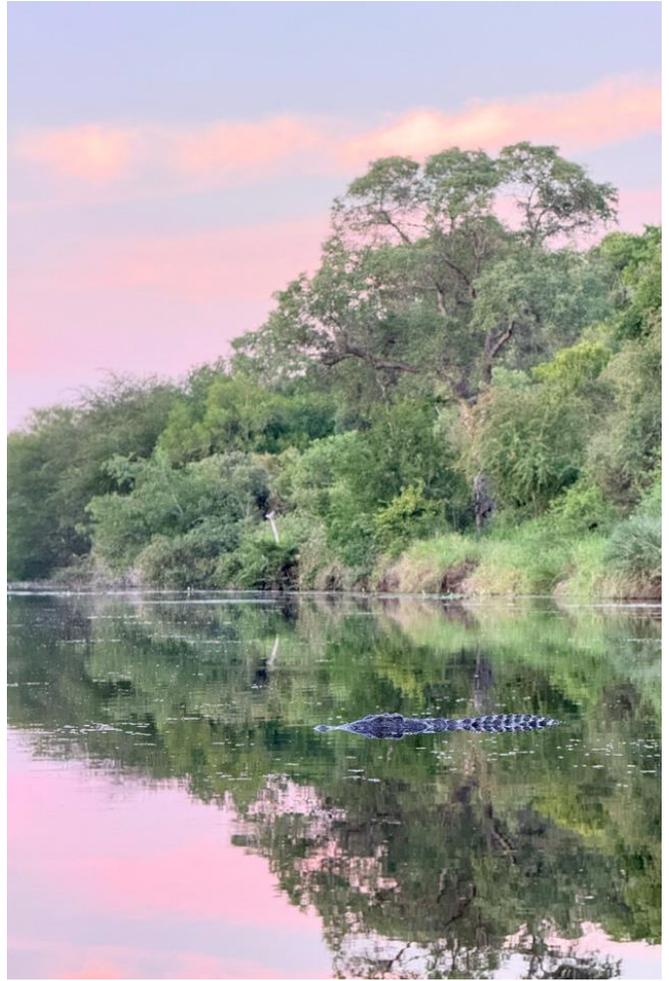
Warthog hiding in the long grass



Clouds building – Photos by Monika Malewski

Southern carmine bee-eater – Photo by Graeme Stuart





Scenes along the N'wanetsi River pre-flood – Photos by Damin Dallas
Panoramic view of Dave's Crossing post flood – Photo by Monika Malewski





The Sonop male – Photo by Damin Dallas



The Mananga Pride – Photo by Damin Dallas



African wild dogs – Photo by Garry Bruce