

Singita



Dumbana young female – Photo by Monika Malewski

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

Temperature

Average minimum: 13.2°C (55.8°F)
Minimum recorded: 08.0°C (46.5°F)
Average maximum: 27.4°C (81.3°F)
Maximum recorded: 31.0°C (87.8°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 0 mm
Season to date: 444 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sept)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06h30
Sunset: 17h30

July at Singita has marked a clear shift in the seasons. The once green landscape has transformed into beautiful shades of gold and burgundy, with a fine dust settling on every surface - a true sign of winter in the Lowveld. After a cold front moved through, temperatures dipped noticeably, but nothing a hot coffee with a splash of Amarula couldn't fix on early morning game drives. With the vegetation thinning out, we enjoyed some incredible predator sightings this month. Lions, leopards, and even hyenas made the most of the easier hunting conditions as the dry season takes its toll on prey species.

A Sightings Snapshot for July follows:

Lions

- The Sonop males have been venturing further south beyond their core territory, with sightings as far south as the Dumbana drainage. This area was once part of the Shishangaan Pride's territory. However, following the disappearance of the Trichardt males and the Sonop males' takeover of the former Mananga Pride territory, the Mananga Pride shifted further south, pushing the Shishangaan Pride even further south and west.
- At the beginning of the month, two of the Chava lionesses joined the Sonop males on their explorations. One afternoon, the Mananga Pride had been feeding on a buffalo bull, and with plenty of meat remaining, we decided to return the following morning. To our surprise, we found two of the Sonop males and two Chava lionesses feeding on what had originally been the Mananga Pride's kill. Based on the tracks, it appears the Mananga lions were chased off. Their tracks were scattered in all directions, suggesting they had to flee quickly into the mountains.
- For the past few weeks, a lone Mananga lioness has been quite vocal, occasionally wandering away from the pride and calling. Could this behaviour have drawn the attention of the Sonop males? It's possible, as earlier this month, one of the Sonop males was seen mating with a single Mananga lioness.
- Love appears to be in the air this July. A single Shishangaan lioness has separated from her pride and has been seen mating with the unnamed male who has been roaming the southern section of our concession, just north of the lodges. He has been very vocal lately, actively marking his new territory. While it's wonderful to have a male lion around again, there's concern that his presence and vocal displays could attract rival coalitions, potentially disrupting the current lion dynamics once more.
- The Shish Pride has been highly active in the south-eastern corner of our concession, leaving tracks on nearly every road. This has given us plenty of clues to decipher as we try to determine their movements. The young males in the pride are now approaching two-and-a-half-years of age and are growing into impressively large individuals, with early signs of manes beginning to form around their necks. For now, the pride has split into two groups, possibly due to territorial dynamics involving the Sonop males, who appear to be attempting a takeover.
- Taking advantage of a massive herd of buffalo moving through their territory toward Gudzani Dam for a morning drink, the Chava Pride managed to isolate an old cow. By that afternoon, we found the entire pride still feeding on the carcass. The cubs are becoming increasingly boisterous, leaping onto the buffalo's chest and tugging at its ears and tail. There's something about a tail — why is it that lion cubs simply can't resist one?

Leopards

- Nhlangueni female was found with an impala hoisted into a beautiful jackal-berry tree along the Xinkelegane drainage. In typical Nhlangueni fashion, the kill was not in the tree for long. She appears to be a leopard that only feeds in a tree when absolutely necessary, such as when hyenas or lions are around. Otherwise, she hides it in a thicket or underneath fallen branches.
- The Dumbana leopards once again dominated our leopard sightings this month. The young male has been venturing further into the outskirts of his mother's territory. On one occasion, his mother and sister left him alone with the remains of an impala stashed in a leadwood tree. While he was feeding, another slightly larger male appeared. This newcomer was less accustomed to vehicles and kept his distance. However, as the last game viewer began to move away from the scene, the unfamiliar male cautiously approached the tree. The Dumbana young male hissed in warning but eventually climbed down, leaving the final scraps of the impala in the fork of the tree. Two weeks later, we found the Dumbana male again—this time with a young impala ram hoisted in a small jackal-berry tree. Less than 24 hours later, the shy male from the central depression was also spotted nearby. We're unsure

whether he fed on the kill, as he, like the previous strange male from the south, has yet to become habituated to our game viewers. He is definitely the larger and more dominant of the two. In fact, while watching the Dumbana young male gnawing on a leg bone, the older male began sawing loudly—a clear vocal assertion of his presence and dominance.

- The Lebombo male has been hunting on the outskirts of the lodge grounds. He successfully caught an impala ewe just beyond our newly built bridge. Later, on the western side of the lodges, he hoisted a young impala ram into a brown ivory tree. Fortunately, he managed to feed on most of it before, the next day, a lone Shish lioness leapt up and snatched the remains from the lower branches, devouring every last piece.

Cheetahs

- A single mother and two cubs were seen on the H6 early one morning. The cubs are almost as big as their mother now, so it is just a matter of time before they disperse to find their own territories.

African wild dogs

- A pair of wild dogs was briefly observed near the Mozambican border, while the larger pack appears to favour the open grasslands north of the H6. This region is currently rich in game, likely due to the Shishangaan drainage, which serves as the closest water source across a wide expanse.

Elephants

- As the vegetation continues to dry out across the reserve, elephant activity around the lodge has noticeably increased. With fresh browse becoming scarce, many herds have begun moving directly through the lodge grounds, taking advantage of trees that had not yet been heavily fed on. One particular group, led by a large, tuskless female, has been seen in and around the lodge almost every week this month—her distinct appearance making her easy to recognise. The elephants have shifted their feeding strategy, now focusing on debarking raisin bushes, and toppling knobthorns, apple leaf trees, and even a few long-tailed cassias to access the nutrient-rich roots and inner bark. It's a stark but fascinating display of their adaptability in the face of seasonal change.

Spotted hyenas

- Spotted hyenas have been active throughout July, with notable sightings including a clan of eight feeding on a giraffe carcass. With no other predators in the vicinity, it's unclear whether the giraffe succumbed to natural causes or if the hyenas managed an impressive kill. Individuals have also been seen at dusk, silently moving along the roads with noses to the wind, searching for their next opportunity. With the abundance of lion and leopard kills we've been fortunate to observe, hyenas are never far behind—often appearing that same evening or by the following day, waiting patiently at the base of trees or lingering at a distance, just out of the lions' line of sight. In the Ostrich Open Area, several cubs from the resident clan have begun venturing away from the den, still under the watchful eye of their mothers or older siblings.

Buffalos

- A massive herd of over 2 000 Cape buffalo has recently been seen roaming near the N'wanetsi River, just west of our concession. In addition to this large group, smaller bachelor herds have been sticking close to the last remaining water pools in the now-dry drainage lines. Meanwhile, smaller herds—numbering a few hundred—continue to move through the northern grasslands, relying on the Gudzani and Mavumbaye Rivers for their daily water needs.

Plains game

- A fresh green flush has emerged in the recently burnt areas, attracting warthogs, zebras, wildebeests, impalas, and countless birds. Meanwhile, the game paths leading to the N'wanetsi River and Gudzani Dam have become busy highways across the dusty plains.

Rare animals and other sightings

- The elusive serval near Gudzani Dam has been seen twice this month—a rare and exciting occurrence in the Lowveld, where this beautiful feline is seldom seen. As the vegetation continues to thin with the dry season, sightings of other nocturnal species such as African civets, genets, and African wildcats have become more frequent. Even black-backed jackals, typically more secretive, are now more commonly seen and heard as they traverse the open short-grass plains.

Birds

- This month brought an unexpected treat for birders: a flock of ten orange-breasted waxbills was observed foraging in a cluster of wild date palms near Gudzani Dam. These striking little birds, with their olive backs, bright orange breasts, and delicate red bills, are not typically seen in this part of the Kruger. Their usual range lies further east and south-east, commonly in the moist grasslands and savannas of KwaZulu-Natal and parts of the Lowveld, making this sighting particularly noteworthy. Meanwhile, vulture activity has been nothing short of epic. The carcasses of a giraffe, three buffalo, and several impalas provided ample feeding grounds, drawing in large congregations of scavengers. On one such occasion, we recorded the rare Cape vulture, a species now endangered due to poisoning, power line collisions, and diminishing nesting sites. Their presence alongside the formidable lappet-faced vultures and the ghostly pale white-headed vultures made for a dramatic scene. This time of year, the riverine thickets between Sweni and Lebombo Lodge may offer a rare glimpse of the Eastern nicator. With olive-green plumage, pale yellow underparts, and subtle light-yellow spots on its back, it blends in perfectly to the dense tangled undergrowth.

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



Chava lioness and cubs – Photo by Matt Holland

The dry season in Kruger National Park, which runs from May through September, is widely recognized as the most rewarding time for game viewing. During these cooler, rainless months, the landscape undergoes a dramatic transformation that enhances both visibility and wildlife activity, making it the prime period for safari experiences across the park.

With daily temperatures averaging in the mid-to-high 20°Cs and a near-complete absence of rainfall, the lush green vegetation of the wet season gives way to an open, drier landscape. The dense undergrowth and thick grasses recede, revealing a more accessible terrain where animals are no longer hidden from view. This seasonal thinning of the bush makes it significantly easier to observe a wide range of species—both large and small—as they move through the savanna.

Among the most sought-after sightings are the Big Five: lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo, and rhinoceros. However, the dry season also offers excellent opportunities to see plains game such as impalas, kudus, and zebras, as well as predators like cheetahs, hyenas, and wild dogs. Birdwatchers will find plenty to marvel at too,

including rare species and vibrant residents like the lilac-breasted roller, whose colourful plumage stands out vividly against the earth-toned backdrop. With fewer insects during this time, bird sightings are clearer and more frequent, and the overall safari experience becomes more comfortable for guests.

At Singita Kruger National Park, the setting of the lodges takes full advantage of the dry season's natural visibility. Both lodges are uniquely positioned on a private concession at the confluence of the N'wanetsi and Sweni Rivers, providing elevated views across the open plains and riparian zones. Floor-to-ceiling glass walls in the suites allow guests to watch animals from the comfort of their rooms, while the lodge's rooftop decks offer panoramic perspectives perfect for wildlife observation throughout the day.

The river systems below the lodge serve as essential lifelines during the dry season. As water becomes scarce across the broader landscape, animals increasingly congregate around reliable sources such as the N'wanetsi River, Sweni River, Gudzani Dam, and Pony Pan. This seasonal gathering of species leads to some of the most concentrated wildlife activity of the year, as elephants, antelope, and buffalo arrive daily to drink, bathe, and feed in the surrounding areas.

The concentration of wildlife around these permanent water sources is one of the defining features of the dry season. Elephants often dominate the scene, arriving in herds to quench their thirst and cool off with dust baths. Buffaloes appear in large numbers, their movements often kicking up clouds of dust that add to the drama of the setting. Hippos wallow in shrinking pools, while crocodiles bask silently on the riverbanks. Predators, in turn, take advantage of the increasing density of prey around waterholes, leading to heightened chances of witnessing natural interactions—sometimes peaceful, sometimes predatory.

Unlike in the public areas of Kruger, the Singita concession is private, which means there are fewer vehicles and less disturbance at sightings. This exclusivity allows guides to take their time at each encounter, offering guests a deeper understanding of animal behaviour and ecology, as well as more time to photograph or simply observe without interruption.

As the roads dry out and the ground hardens, animal tracks become more visible and more informative. Guides and trackers rely heavily on footprints, droppings, and subtle signs to interpret recent activity. This makes the dry season an excellent time to learn about tracking, as the dust-covered terrain clearly records the movements of leopards, lions, and other elusive species. Morning and late afternoon game drives often begin with a review of overnight tracks, leading to exciting pursuits through the open bush.

Large mammals become more mobile during the dry season, shifting their home ranges to stay close to water. Elephants, buffaloes, and zebras are particularly affected, often moving in predictable patterns that guests may observe over multiple days. Even less frequently seen animals, such as the white rhino, tend to become more localized, increasing the chances of sightings.

As the sun dips below the horizon, the dry season delivers one final gift: crystal-clear night skies. With minimal humidity and virtually no light pollution, the stars are spectacular! After an evening game drive, guides often stop in open areas for a short stargazing session, pointing out constellations like the Southern Cross, Scorpius, or the glowing band of the Milky Way. The cooling temperatures and stillness of the bush create a perfect atmosphere for reflection at the end of a wildlife-filled day.

The dry season in Kruger is more than just a popular time for safaris—it's a natural convergence of wildlife, visibility, and comfort. The thinning vegetation, reliable water sources, and cooler temperatures all work together to create optimal conditions for observing animals. Whether you're watching elephants from your

suite, tracking lions at dawn, or gazing at stars after sunset, the dry season at Singita Kruger National Park provides a wildlife experience that is as educational as it is unforgettable.



Kudu bull drinking – Photo by Monika Malewski

What happens to all the creepy crawlies in winter?

Article by Monika Malewski

As the golden grass of the N’wanetsi Concession glows under the soft winter sun, and the crisp mornings echo with bird calls, you may notice something strangely missing: the steady buzz and flurry of insect life. Where are all the beetles, butterflies, and spiders that seemed so abundant just a few months ago?

While many animals in the bush take winter in their stride, insect and spider activity seems to slow down dramatically or vanish altogether. But they haven’t disappeared. They’re just biding their time, quietly riding out the cold in ways that are both fascinating and ingenious.

Dung Beetles: The Bush’s Tireless Recyclers... Take a Break

During the hot summer months, dung beetles are everywhere—rolling, burying, and feeding off dung with astonishing energy. But come winter, their activity drops off sharply. These industrious insects are cold-blooded, meaning they rely on external warmth to stay active. So, as temperatures dip, dung beetles go into a kind of deep rest, known as diapause.

Some species retreat underground, where they stay dormant in small burrows or inside dung balls they buried earlier in the season. Others have already completed their life cycle, and the new generation remains underground as larvae or pupae, waiting for the return of summer rains to emerge and start the cycle again.



Golden Orb-web Spiders: Vanishing Acts in Silken Silence

In summer, golden orb-web spiders (famous for their large, intricate webs that shimmer in the sun) are a common sight across the concession. By July, however, the webs are mostly gone. What happened?

Golden orb-web spiders are annuals, meaning most only live for a single season. The large females (often seen in webs) die off in autumn after mating and laying eggs. These eggs are safely tucked away in well-hidden sacs—often in vegetation or under bark—where they remain through the winter. The tiny spiderlings will only hatch when spring brings warmth and plentiful insect prey.

Some spiders, like jumping spiders, trapdoor spiders, or baboon spiders (our local tarantulas), have a different strategy. These species can live multiple years and spend the cold months in protective retreats—under rocks, in burrows, or even sealed behind tiny silk “doors.” There, they remain inactive, conserving energy until the warmth of spring calls them back out.

Golden Orb-web Spider – Photo by Monika

Other Insects: Masters of Survival

Winter affects different insects in different ways, but here are some general survival tactics commonly used by insects in the Kruger region:

- Egg stage hibernation: Many insects lay eggs that are built to survive harsh conditions. These eggs won’t hatch until it’s safe for the young.
- Larval stage survival: Caterpillars and grubs often spend the winter tucked away inside wood, underground, or in leaf litter.
- Pupal stage dormancy: Think of a butterfly’s chrysalis—it’s a perfect example of an insect “waiting room,” where transformation takes place slowly over weeks or even months.
- Adult hiding: Some adult insects, like certain ants and beetles, find shelter in tree bark, cracks in rocks, or beneath the soil.

The slowdown of insect life might seem like a lull in the bush, but it’s actually a crucial part of the natural rhythm. Insects take this time to conserve energy, avoid harsh conditions, and prepare for the breeding boom that comes with the rainy season. Their disappearance allows birds, reptiles, and mammals to adjust their feeding habits—and gives the ecosystem a chance to reset. And when the first summer storms arrive, the bush will explode once again with buzzing wings, shimmering webs, and the complex life cycles that have evolved to dance in time with Africa’s seasons.

So next time you walk through the winter bush and find it quiet and still, remember: Nature is never truly asleep. It’s just preparing for its next big show...

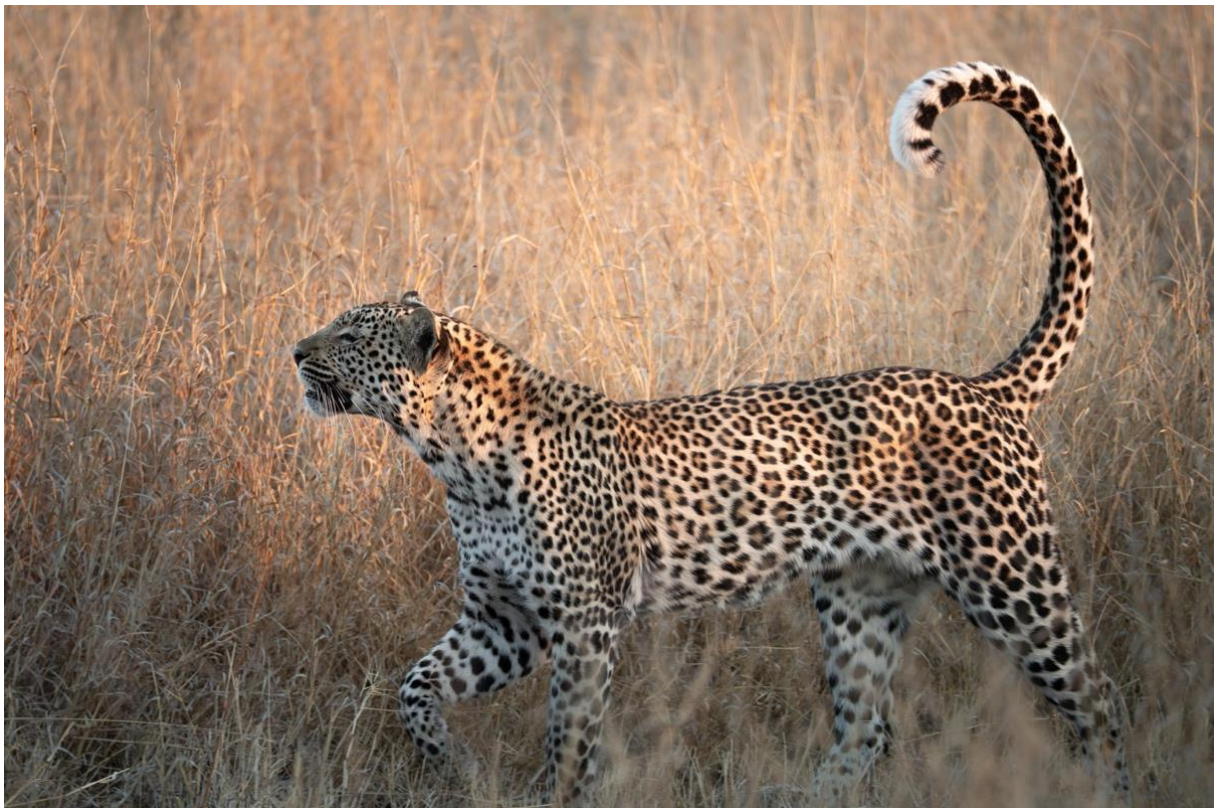


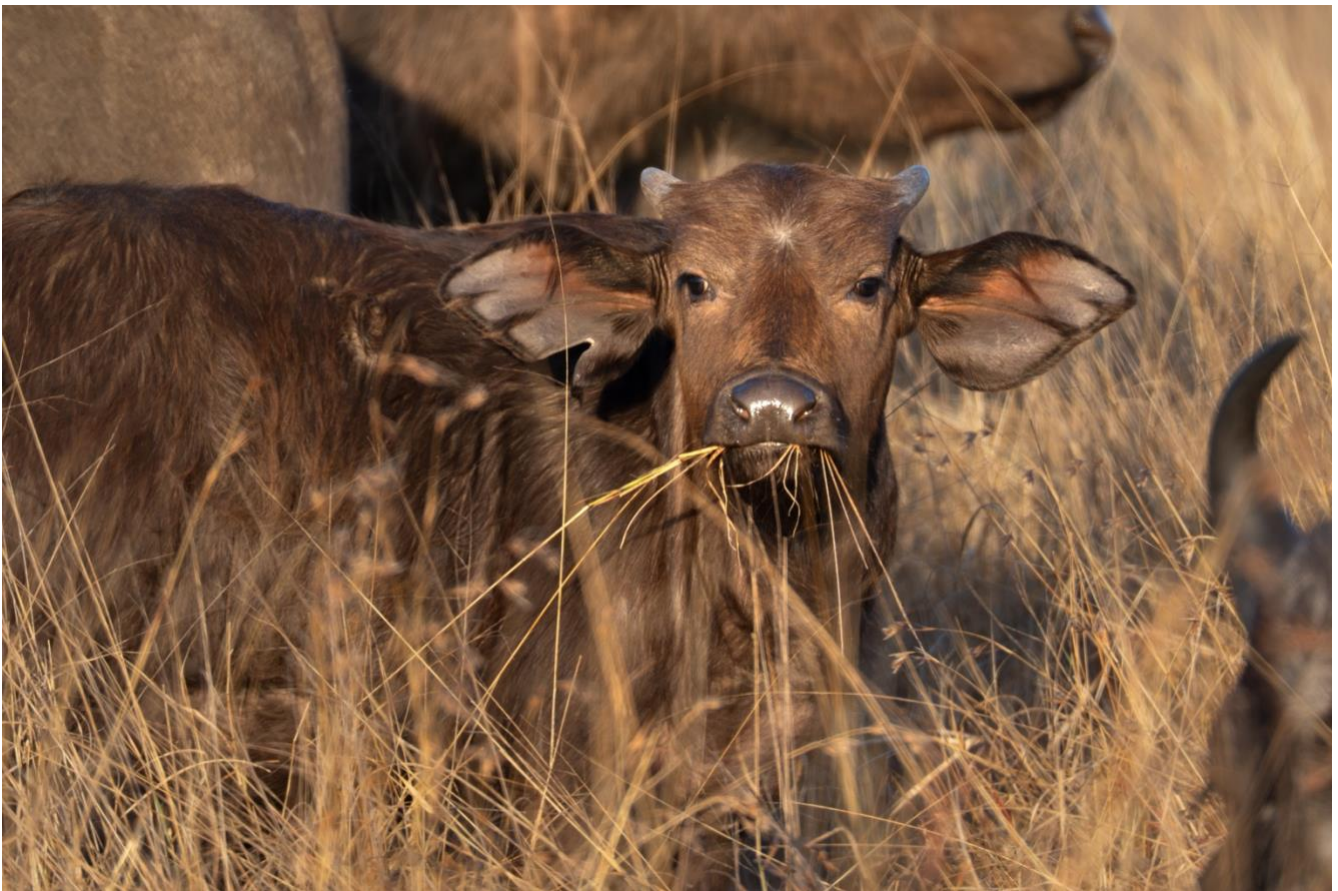
Transvaal thick-tailed Scorpion – Photo by
Brian Rode

July Gallery



Klipspringer – Photo by Monika Malewski
Dumbana young female – Photo by Monika Malewski



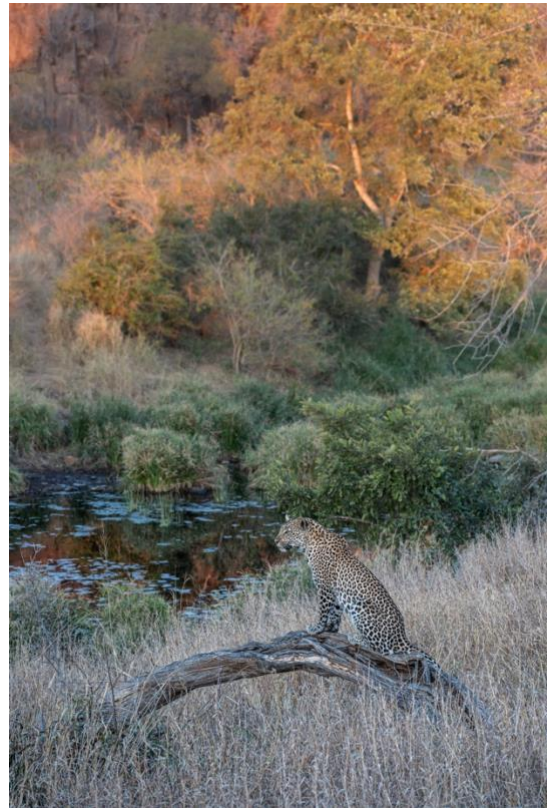


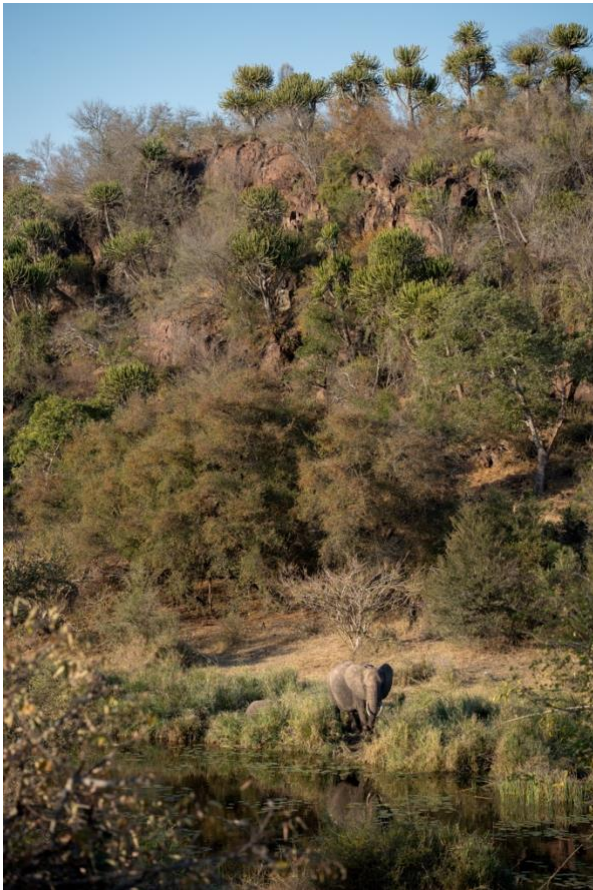
African buffalo calf – Photo by Monika Malewski

Southern white-faced owl – Photo by Monika Malewski

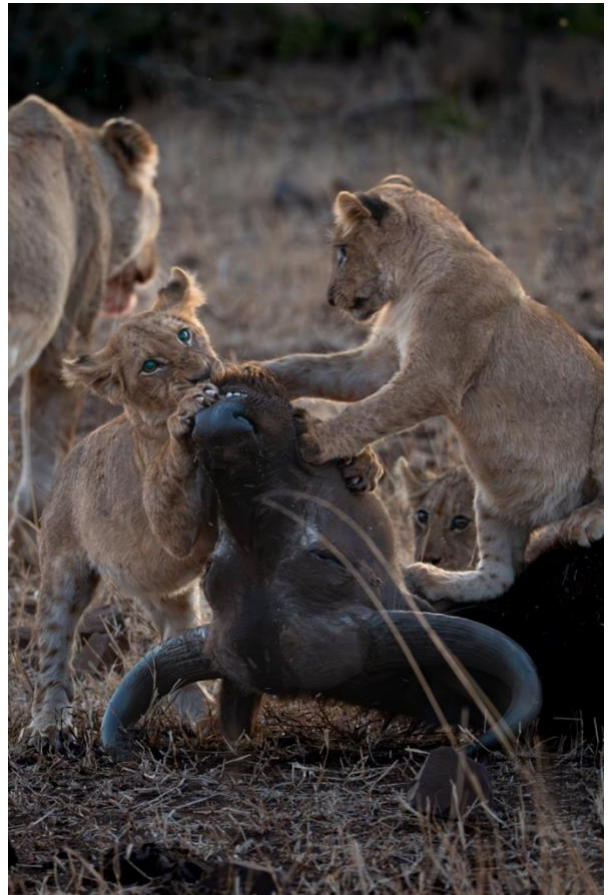


Dumbana young female – Photo by Monika Malewski





N'wanetsi Scene – Photo by Monika Malewski
Nhlanguleni female – Photo by Monika Malewski



Chava Pride cubs – Photo by Monika Malewski





Spotted hyena – Photo by Monika Malewski

Elephant at sunset – Photo by Matt Holland





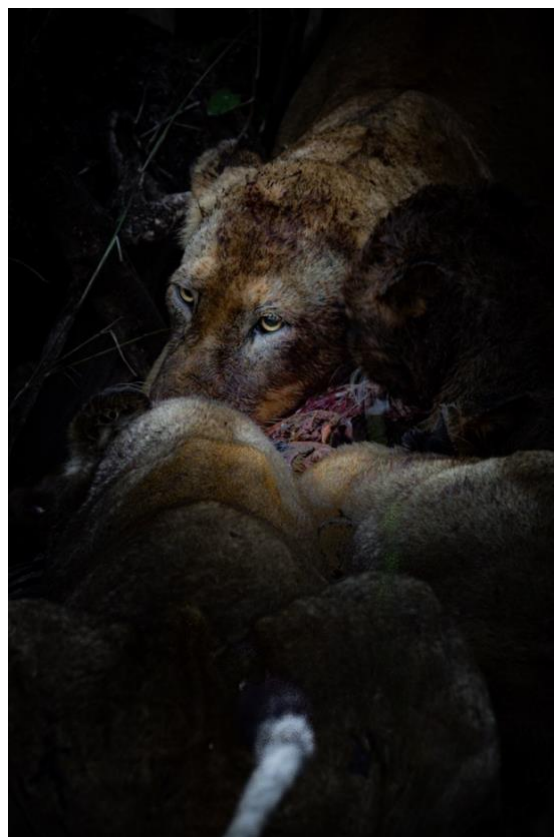
Greater kudu – Photo by Monika Malewski

Greater painted snipe – Photo by Monika Malewski





Tawny eagle – Photo by Monika Malewski



Lionesses feeding – Photo by Matt Holland

Chacma Baboon – Photo by Monika Malewski



Compiled by Monika Malewski