

Singita



Photo by Margaux le Roux

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

Temperature

Average minimum: 19.5°C (73.4°F)
Minimum recorded: 16.0°C (66.2°F)
Average maximum: 31.6°C (85.92°F)
Maximum recorded: 37.0°C (96.8°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 30.5mm
Season to date: 733 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06h08
Sunset: 17:57

As we approach the end of our last summer month, venturing onto the concession means a trip into a summer wonderland with some roads being more like tunnels through the long grass, as the bush continues to be lush and green with the rivers almost bursting their banks. The streams continue to cascade down from the Lebombo Mountains even though the rains have started to abate somewhat. The marula trees' sweet and juicy fruits have all but disappeared and most of the animals are in absolute peak condition. The night skies seem clearer and the mornings are crisp with a mist hovering over the Lebombo Mountains which is more typical of the drier months to come. The thick grass layer has provided great breeding opportunities for many of the ground birds, and the francolins and spurfowls are seen with lots of chicks running behind the adults in the

roads in front of us. There are also signs that the impala rutting season is starting with the virile rams bellowing and chasing the ewes around. The migratory bird population is thinning out as they leave to head north into northern Africa and Europe, some will even venture all the way back to Asia.

Here's a Sightings Snapshot for March:

Lions

- The Shishangaan Pride was seen on the 6th and then again on the 28th of this month. They have spent most of their time off our concession to the south west.
- The Kumana male has been seen regularly around the lodges. His roars have been heard echoing off the granophyre ridges every few nights and he has also been patrolling his known territory far and wide, possibly attempting to find the Shishangaan lionesses.
- The Mananga Pride have also been covering a lot of ground this month with them seen in both the far southern reaches of their territory and then a few short days later in the very far northern parts. On the 30th of this month we had our first look at the two new members of the pride and they appear to be between two and three months old.
- The old Shishangaan male has been seen on a number of occasions with the Mananga Pride, and was seen mating with a Mananga lioness.
- The Mananga Pride was also found with a buffalo carcass on our northern most boundary.
- The Mountain Pride had been in the most northern parts of our concession and then shifted down towards the central parts towards the end of the month. One evening some lucky guests witnessed them successfully hunt a fully grown warthog near Warthog Pan.
- Two young unknown male lions have been seen harassing one of the Shishangaan males. On one occasion the reports were that they had seemed to share the same kill.
- The 29th of March was an interesting day for the lions of the Lebombo concession. In the morning, a coalition of seven young adult male lions were found traveling east on the road towards the lodges. The Kumana male was not far away at the time and by himself he does not stand much of a chance against the superior numbers. Only time will tell.
- On the 31st, the two unknown young male lions were found finishing off a zebra kill.

Leopards

- We have enjoyed a number of sightings of the Mbiri male leopard. He has mostly been seen in the central parts of the concession, often climbing trees and attempting to hunt impala and even young zebra. One morning he was found feasting on a porcupine kill.
- The Mhlangulene female was seen with her cub a number of times. She was found feeding on an impala kill that she hoisted into a tree to save her prize from a marauding hyena.
- Another unidentified female leopard was seen north of Gudzane Dam, sneaking through a large herd of elephants.
- Towards the end of the month a young male with a slightly broken tail, was seen near Croc View over the course of two days.
- An unknown male was seen near Gudzane Dam on the 30th March.

Cheetahs

- Two male cheetahs have been seen occasionally, on the road that leads to the staff village. On one of the days they had very full bellies.

Wild dogs

- The pack of dogs that numbered six seems to have lost two members. On the 8th and 9th they were seen hunting close to the entrance to the lodge, then on the 30th they appeared one morning hunting in the same area.

Spotted hyenas

- Hyenas have been sighted foraging along the roads at night. There was also individuals in attendance at the leopard and lion kills, patiently waiting their turn to feed. All of the known den-sites have remained inactive over the summer.
- A hyena was also seen attempting to chase down a zebra during an evening drive back to camp.

Elephants

- At the beginning of the month the elephant sightings were limited to mainly bulls and smaller family groups. Around the middle of the month the herds returned with sightings of groups numbering as many as 40.
- Musth bulls have also been present this month with a few individuals sporting impressive tusks.

Buffalos

- Most sightings of buffalo have been bulls and smaller breeding herds. The reason for this dispersal is possibly because of wide availability of water and good grazing after the summer rains.

Plains game

- As always there is an abundance of zebras and wildebeest. Giraffes are a common sight in the mountains and even in the grassland.

Rare animals and other sightings

- A caracal was seen late one night, close to the staff village.
- African wild cats have provided some great sightings.

Birds

- A total of 197 birds were recorded for the month of March.
- A golden pipit was seen by the Nat Geo film crew sometime in February (but was only reported to us in March). This is an incredible record for the area (there have been possibly fewer than 20 sightings in South Africa, in total), and is the second bird of this particular species that has been seen in the area in the past five years.
- Lesser moorhen with chicks, broad-billed rollers, African crakes, dwarf bitterns have all been great records this month.

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



Leopard Tortoises occur in a wide range of environments; their main diet is grass. We often see them in summer just after the rainfall. For a very small creature they provide important ecosystem functions, such as dispersing seed and form burrows for refuge. Tortoise movement has previously been shown to be related to resource availability, reproductive status and local environmental conditions. However, understanding of the variables that drive their movement remains low. Leopard tortoise are known to leave pheromone trails in order to communicate with the others, in this way they are able to find a partner for breeding opportunities. Predation and survival rate: Their main predator is the Ground hornbill, who have strong, sharp beaks that are able to crack the leopard tortoise shell. Honey badger have been also recorded to feed on them. Their survival rates however are generally very good. There are records of them living between 30 to 75 years, and sometimes up to 100 years. Having a strong shell that is well camouflaged with rosette-like spots (like a leopard) makes them blend in very well with the environment. We often drive past them crossing the road, but should take a moment to stop and look at them, as they are beautiful looking creatures.

The greatest show on Earth

Article by Brian Rode

It was a beautiful, balmy evening as we headed back to camp. The cloud cover had opened up and the stars were showing in all their glory. A crescent moon rose above the horizon to the east and the moonlight glistened on the spiderwebs. It had been a great afternoon in the bush and we had seen lots of birds and animals. The veld is looking beautiful and bountiful at the moment. We have had quite a bit of rain these last months and the streams in the hills are all flowing strongly.

Earlier on in the afternoon we had seen many barn swallows gathering in the dead trees as the birds get ready to start their long migration north to Europe. Their holidays in Africa are coming to an end. We were about twenty minutes away from the lodge and were coming to Dave's Crossing, a low-level causeway across the N'wanetsi River. We came down the steep embankment onto the bridge and stopped in the middle of it. I stopped the vehicle and turned off the engine so that we could sit peacefully and listen to some of the sounds.



The river was gurgling peacefully over the rocks. It is amazing how the sound of water can relax a person. I quickly flashed the spotlight across the water and around us to make sure there was nothing dangerous approaching. I could see the red eyes of the crocodiles glowing in the water, reflecting the ray of the spotlight. The light reflected up into the trees and we could see a large owl sitting on one of the branches of the sycamore fig, a water-loving tree that was growing on the bank. I turned off the spotlight, having seen that there was nothing around that was possibly going to give us trouble. Our eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness and the stars lit up the skies. Orion was directly above us, staring down at us parked on the bridge. We could see his two hunting dogs that accompany him and Sirius the bright star that forms one of the dog's noses was glowing in the darkness. Sirius is the brightest star in the night sky and was showing beautifully, glinting and shimmering in the darkness. Lepus, the hare, was crouched at the hunter's feet and Columba, the dove, was also nearby.

The Milky Way stretched across the sky above us. It reminded me of the story of how a bushman woman had been sitting by the fireside, waiting for the return of the men from the village who had gone out a few days previously to hunt and provide food for the rest of the tribe. They had been gone quite a while and she was worried that maybe they were lost. She gathered up a handful of ash from the fire and threw it up into the sky in a line across the heavens as a path to direct them back home.

The stars were reflecting in the water and as it flowed downstream the movement caused the lights to dance on the surface. In the grass on the embankment the fireflies were flashing. It was as if the stars in the sky, the reflections in the water and the fireflies were all celebrating and having a party.

The music was provided by the frogs, with the banded rubber frogs giving their high pitch trills. These are amazing looking frogs that are bright pink/red and dark black in colour. They are usually difficult to find as they often hide under fallen branches. The bass sounds were being provided by the eastern olive toads and the red toads, and the painted reed frogs were adding their tinkling, bell-like sounds from the rushes and sedges. Every once in a while, a bubbling cassina called from the grassland nearby and it sounded like they were popping open the champagne and then the opera started as the fiery-necked nightjar started warbling with its, "Good

Lord deliver us” chorus. In the hills the freckled nightjar replied with the repetitive, “kow kow” beat. It was as if we were listening to Paul McCartney’s song, “We all stand together”.



Further upstream we could hear some large animal crossing the river and a hyena whooped from the hills near the Granophyre ridge. It was beautiful! So serene. It was one of those moments when you are just in the present and your worries and thoughts have just disappeared.

I recalled the words of Eckhart Tolle from his best-selling book, “The Power of Now”: *“Presence is needed to become aware of the beauty, the majesty, the sacredness of nature. Have you ever gazed up into the infinity of space on a clear night, awestruck by the absolute stillness and inconceivable vastness of it? Have you listened, truly listened, to the sound of a mountain stream in the forest? Or to the song of a blackbird at dusk on a quiet summer evening? To become aware of such things, the mind needs to be still. You have to put down for a moment your personal baggage of problems, of past and future, as well as all your knowledge, otherwise you will see but not see, hear but not hear. Your total presence is required”.*

Supper was calling us now and we took a last look at the vast grandeur of the night skies. It was as if the stars were all watching the show and we almost expected them to give applause to the show below. We could have stayed there the whole night and carried on listening to the amazing concert that Nature was giving. We certainly felt privileged!



Giraffe and youngster



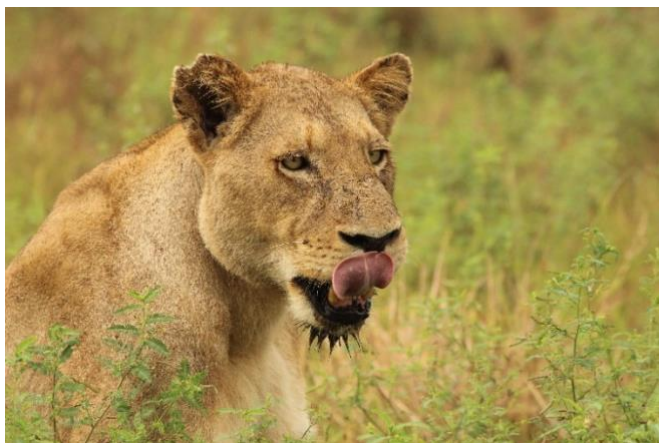
Tawny Eagle



Zebras sparring



Big bull elephant



Lioness



Young male leopard



Water Monitor



Buffalo bull



Southern carmine bee-eaters



Common tigertail dragonfly



Giraffe scene



African scops owl



Mbiri male leopard



African wild dogs / painted wolves playing

