

Singita



Photo By Solomon Ndlovu

WILDLIFE JOURNAL SINGITA KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA For September, Two Thousand and Twenty-two

Temperature

Average minimum: 25.0°C (77.3°F)
Minimum recorded: 24.0°C (66.2°F)
Average maximum: 36.2°C (97.16°F)
Maximum recorded: 40.0°C (104.0°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 16mm
Season to date: 506mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05H47
Sunset: 17H46

Spring has come with beautiful flowers this year. We have seen the flame creepers and climbing combretum highlighting the bush in the southern part of the concession. The blood-red flowers of the weeping boer-bean tree have a high nectar content and have been attracting a lot of different birds. Reptiles have started to show themselves, and we have seen a boomslang which has been spending time around the Lebombo Access Road. Migratory birds are slowly coming back, we have seen some bee-eaters, a Wahlberg eagle, a yellow-billed kite,

and a Klass's cuckoo. The Klass's cuckoo has been very active calling along the N'wanetsi River. European bee-eaters were seen once on H6 near S37. The impala lilies are still in flower and many of the long-tailed cassia trees are still showing their beautiful bloom, with their bright yellow blossoms. Some of these trees, however, have finished flowering and are starting to get their lime-green foliage. Other plants that are in flower at the moment, or are starting to flower, include the russet bushwillows.

Here's a Sightings Snapshot for September:

Lions

- The Shishangaan Pride has been running away from the new males that have arrived in the area and now they seem like they have accepted the Trichardt males as the dominant males for the territory. Some of the lionesses were seen mating with them. They have been spotted spending time around the N'wanetsi River and moving east towards the eastern boundary with Mozambique. We are hoping to see cubs in the next couple of months. There are currently seven lionesses in the pride.
- Mananga Pride has also been spending time in the concession. The pride is still split into two groups, a group of seventeen and eight. They sometimes join together when they have killed a big animal. They have been moving between Gundzane Dam and the Xinkelengana drainage, where there have been large numbers of zebra, kudu, wildebeest and waterbuck. The Shishangaan males were also seen joining them from time to time.
- Mountain Pride has often crossed east into Mozambique and has not been spending a lot of time in the concession.

Leopards

- The Nhlangueni female was spotted on an impala kill around the Central Depression, and her cubs are looking healthy. It looks like she is using the rocky outcrops to hide her cubs and then moves west into the depression to hunt.
- The Dumbana female has expanded her territory. A few months ago she was seen near the lodge and moving north towards the southern side of the central depression. We think she travels distances to allow her cubs to become independent and start learning to hunt because they are almost ready to leave their mother. She has been very successful in providing food for her cubs. A male leopard was spotted when the Dumbana was feeding on an impala kill and the next day one of the cubs had a huge cut on his shoulder. This might have happened when the young male was trying to hunt or feed.
- A skittish male leopard has been spotted a couple of times south of the concession, on the way to the Poort.

Wild dogs

- We have not had any sightings for this month. Tracks have been spotted in the south-east of the concession, near the fenceline, moving up and down. We still believe they are in Mozambique where they might have been denning. The pack will probably move back once the pups are old enough to hunt with them.

Spotted hyenas

- Hyena sightings have been good. Almost every night we will come across a hyena or hear them vocalizing.
- A clan of hyenas was seen finishing up a buffalo carcass that was killed by the Mananga Pride at Gundzane north.
- We have located a den-site west of Dudu's Crossing on top of the ridge, but unfortunately cannot get access with a vehicle. A heavily pregnant female was seen at Xineneni Poort, lying in the water, and headed north towards the den later.

Elephants

- We had amazing elephant sightings this month of them drinking and wallowing along the N'wanetsi River. Sightings have been mainly in the late morning when guides are about to make their way back to camp.
- Tiny little calves have also been spotted amongst the different breeding herd groups.

Buffalos

- A breeding herd totalling around a thousand buffalo has been recorded moving in east and out west of the concession. They have been closely followed by Mananga Pride, looking for hunting opportunities.
- Currently we have two groups of buffalo bulls in the concession that spend time in the hills and regularly come to the last remaining pools of water to quench their thirst.

Plains game

- Prominent pathways have been created coming from the east in the mountainous terrain and down towards the depression area. We have seen wildebeest, zebras, impalas, giraffes, waterbuck, buffalos, and elephants together in one area.
- We have been fortunate to see young giraffe calves and there are many females that seem to be expecting.

Rare animals and other sightings

- Two male cheetahs were seen coming into the concession from the west. They tried to hunt some waterbuck but were not successful.
- The same day the two males were located, a female cheetah with two cubs was also seen moving into the sticky thorn thickets.

Birds

- A gorgeous bush-shrike was spotted around Nyokeni Valley. It was an incredible sighting of this beautiful bird. First sighting that has ever been recorded on the property.
- We had quite a few sightings of eastern nicator around the lodge and they have been very vocal, contacting each other.
- A breeding pair of greater painted-snipes has been seen regularly.

Bats are the only true mammal that can fly in the whole world! Bats are very interesting animals and have a unique gift that other mammals don't, and that is the ability to fly. They are classified in their special order of mammals called Chiroptera.

Different cultures all around the world have varied beliefs about bats. In my culture (Shangaaan or Tsonga) when a bat comes to your house it is regarded as bad luck. However, these animals are very good for the environment and they often help human beings more than cause trouble for us. They are well known for eating hundreds of mosquitos at night, and that reduces the risk of disease that affects humans. It is good to know that with them reducing the number of mosquitos fewer mosquitos will transmit malaria.

Some bats are able to communicate by sound and by listening to the echo to learn how far the nearest bat or object is.



They live in big groups of more than fifty together. It is always amazing to see them coming out of their roosting spots at sunset and to see a cloud of bats flying. If one of them can eat hundreds of mosquitos at night, a flock will eat more than 500 000 mosquitos that were going to irritate and bite us while sitting around the fire and telling each other stories!

Fruit-eating bats also play an important role in seed germination where they will eat some seeds and fly to defecate somewhere else where the seeds will start germinating.

Because bats are active at night they do not have many predators, and this assists them to be able to live a long life. They have been recorded to live to thirty years old. They can be affected by disease, and that's one of the biggest threats they have out in the wild. They are able to hide from their predators by hiding inside caves, and in trees. They have the advantage of having a unique physical ability, which is resting hanging upside down. It looks uncomfortable, but bats are adapted to do this. They have incredibly long claws to grip onto branches of trees or cave walls, and the claws are also used to catch food. When resting they are almost invisible because of the way they hang and camouflage themselves.

The one thing you notice when you are on safari is the vast number of dead trees scattered across the landscape, like perfectly placed ornaments adding depth to any scene they stand in. Unlike ornaments that just serve to be visually pleasing, dead trees serve various purposes in the bush, but before we go into the 'how' we need to discuss the 'what'.



Leopard resting on the top of a dead leadwood tree that has a leopard orchid growing from it, while watching vultures perched on the same tree. A few guarri bushes grow at its base.

There are a number of things that kill and/or lead trees to their death but the main causes (the 'what') can be divided into three things, which are: animals, acts of nature, and plants.

There are a lot of animals that contribute to the death of trees that we see in our environment, such as the elephants which are the largest contributors to the death of trees. Elephants usually de-bark the tree trunk trying to feed on the cambium layer of the tree. If they successfully remove the entire bark in a continuous ring shape the tree will no longer be able to transport nutrients and water across its system, and the whole tree will die and dry up. Porcupines will dig and eat the tree roots which are the trees main way of accessing water and nutrients from the ground. If these roots are significantly compromised then the tree will shrivel and dry up. Elephants are known to feed on the roots too. In addition, some animals like buffalo, wildebeest, rhinos ,and some antelope, will rub their horns against a tree trunk. If the resultant debarking has been significantly compromised this can cause these younger trees to dry up and die.



Elephants feeding on grasses in an area surrounded by dead trees

The acts of nature include, but are not limited to, lightning which will strike the tree directly, sending current from the top to the bottom of the tree or indirectly hitting the tree near enough to get affected. At times a single stroke of lightning can heat the air around it to 30 000°C, so in cases of lightning strike the tree will essentially be killed by the electric current and heat. Natural fires can also lead to the death of some trees, more specifically trees whose bark system has been destroyed by the flames but the inner support structure of the tree remains intact. In addition fires burning under the surface of the soil can destroy root systems which will kill the tree. During the dry season most trees will stop supplying water to the leaves to save water to aid in the survival of the rest of the tree, and leaves will start falling off. If a drought comes and the expected rain doesn't arrive most of these types of trees will start drying up. Drought also causes changes in ground water level, specifically dropping the ground water levels causing the death of trees.

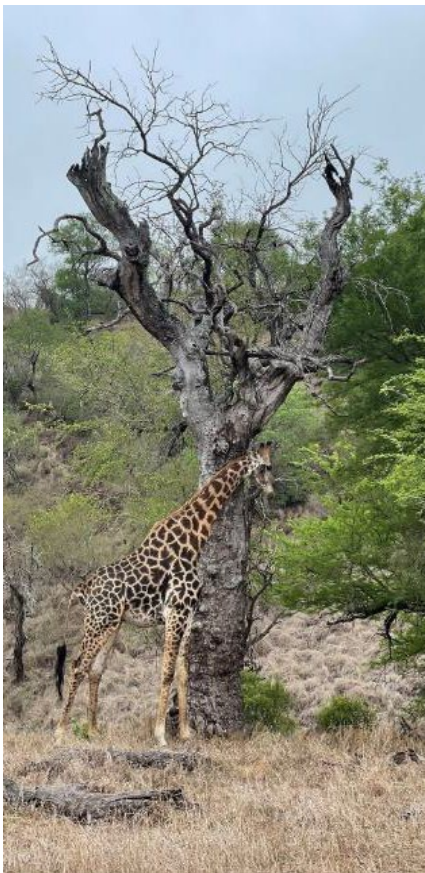


Dead leadwood tree at sunset

There are a number of plants that cause the death of trees, such as creepers that creep up to the top of the tree trunk. Once they reach the canopy of the tree they begin to spread out and grow to an extent where their own leaf canopy covers the host leaf canopy, blocking it of any sunlight which leads to the death of that tree. Strangler figs do a similar thing beginning their journey as seeds on the top of the tree top and, as they grow, their root systems descend on the host trunk, eventually outcompeting with the host tree in a parasitic manner where they outcompete for the soil nutrients, water, and the sunlight as their tree canopy gets larger, but also, as its name suggests, its roots begin constricting/strangling the hosts trunk, leading to its death.

The death of trees in a natural system is nothing to mourn as it is very important to have dead trees in an ecosystem because many animals and plants make use of these dead trees to aid in their survival, such as big birds that specifically perch/roost on these dead trees, birds like eagles, storks and vultures who enjoy the convenience of being able to land and take off from them easily and the great 360 degree visibility they give. Termites and borer beetles feed on these dead decomposing trees. Some orchids grow on them. They are used as a rubbing post for many animals. And over all the reduction of the tree numbers in this area keeps the habitat balanced ensuring these trees do not “over run” this type of habitat which could lead to these unchallenged trees growing into maturity, and if unchallenged their canopies would block out the sun rays from reaching the grasses and shrubs that are left in their shadows, which would mean the death of those sun-loving shrubs and grasses. In turn animals relying on feeding on those shrubs and grasses would move off, changing the biodiverse ecosystem.

All of these elements acting on the death of trees are playing a niche role in maintaining this environment as we know it, which allows us to enjoy the diversity that it offers.



Giraffe using a dead tree to scratch



Yellow-billed storks perched on a dead tree



Male cheetahs in the afternoon light.



Dumbana young male leopard



The Dumbana young male leopard.





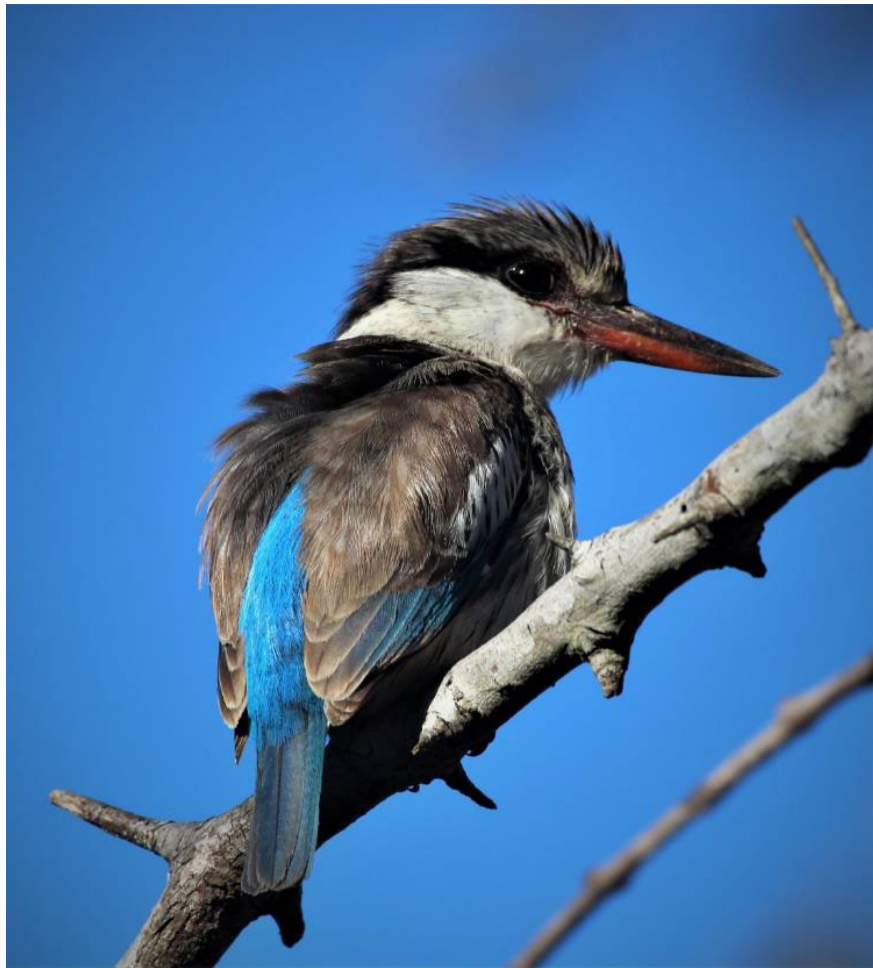
Shish pride young lioness on top of granophyre ridge.



Elephant eye



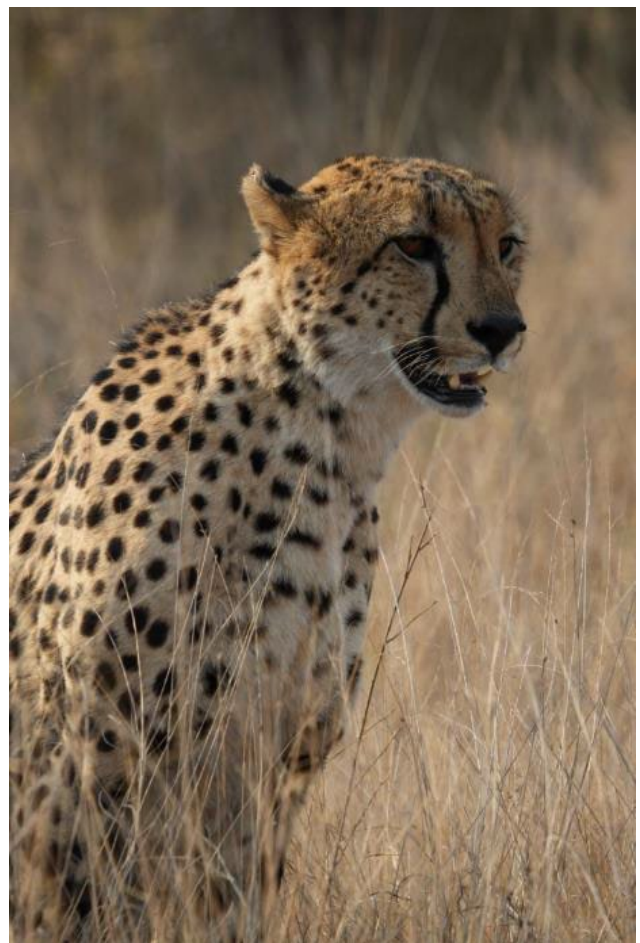
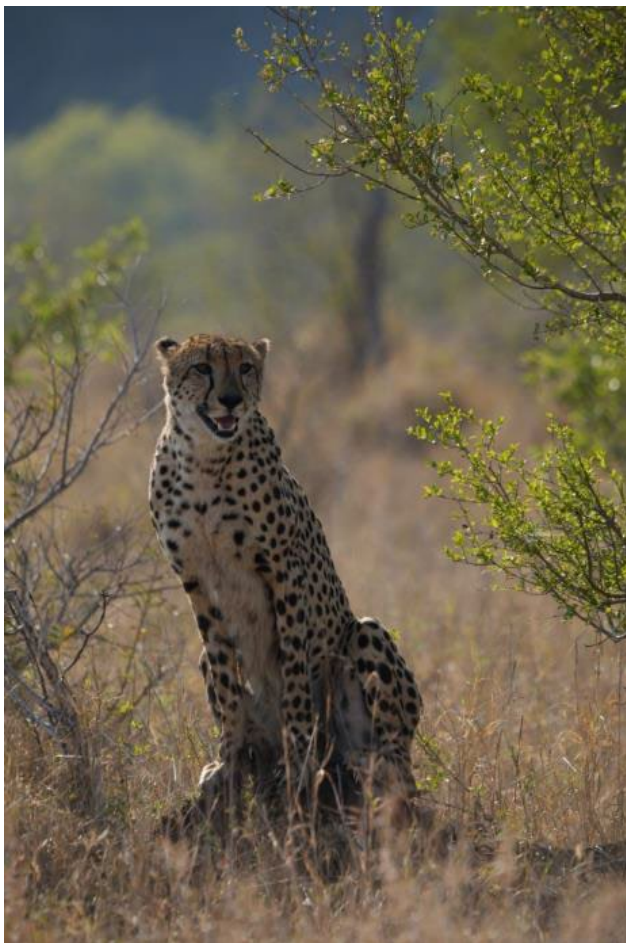
Yellow-billed oxpeckers on a dead leadwood tree.



Striped kingfisher



Spotted hyena



Cheetah



Members of the Mananga Pride



Greater painted-snipes



Giant kingfisher



Elephant bulls