

# Singita



**WILDLIFE JOURNAL**  
**SINGITA SABI SAND, SOUTH AFRICA**  
**For the month of May, Two Thousand and Twenty Three**

**Temperature**

Average minimum: 15.8°C (60.43°F)  
Average maximum: 26.6°C (79.86°F)  
Minimum recorded: 12.0°C (53.60°F)  
Maximum recorded: 35.0°C (95.00°F)

**Rainfall Recorded**

For the month: 57.0 mm  
For the season to date: 646.2mm

**Sunrise & Sunset**

Sunrise: 06:22  
Sunset: 17:18

The month of May can be considered the beginning of winter here in southern Africa. Most mornings start off misty due to the stillness and cool temperatures then gradually open into blue skies. This year we welcomed some light rain at the start of month which has added some green and topped up seasonal pans with small pools of water. Along with ideal weather conditions our wild counterparts have also had us in amazement. Rutting impala have been busily doing their best to cover as many ewes as possible, while storks and herons capitalise on clear pools of water filled with fish. The Sand River still flows steadily keeping hippos submerged in the last remaining eddies in secluded sections of the perennial water course. Dry riverbeds hide gems of their own with a number of lions and leopards stashing their cubs in safe places throughout the reserve. The day is ours with endless possibilities just waiting to be discovered.

### **Cheetahs**

- We have had regular sightings of a male cheetah who seems to be in the process of establishing a territory in the south along the old Selati Railway. For some time this has been the ideal environment to search for these four-legged speedsters. For a number of years there was a male that had held a territory in this area but he was last sighted in February, easily identifiable due to missing the tip of his tail, and we fear he may have been killed by another predator. The new male seems to be a younger individual and hopefully he provides incredible viewing in the years to come.

### **Wild dogs**

- The pack of seven that frequent a large chunk of the central Sabi Sand Nature Reserve have us all excited as the two females in the pack look to both be pregnant. In previous years they have chosen the woodlands to the north of our lodges as a denning site. We will be watching their movements closely as they are due to den any day now.
- We have had great wild dog sightings this month - one worth mentioning was when Marc and Golden were out walking with their guests and spotted the dogs hunting with a few hyenas trailing them.

### **Elephants**

- Elephant viewing has been almost as consistent as the impala herds on the reserve now. Their presence is noticed throughout the area as roots and bulbs are being dug up by the pachyderms in search of nutrients below the surface. Healthy herds, some numbering over 30 members, are a welcome sight at Singita Sabi Sand. When in such large numbers we have the opportunity to recognise some individuals - such as some with half a trunk or leucistic elephants. Besides their differences they inspire us all by overcoming their challenges.

### **Leopards**

- With persistent tracking and sensitive guiding, we have been able to locate the Nkuwa female and her two cubs on a few occasions. We were lucky enough to find them on a kill which allowed us to expose the cubs to vehicles, slowly gaining their trust in us. We estimate the cubs to be around five months of age.
- On a similar note, the Schotia female and her cub are doing well. She has been sighted on several occasions mainly to the west of our lodges. The cub has become habituated to vehicles in a short period of time. One sighting that stands out is the Schotia female returning to her den with a chunk of a kill. This behaviour has rarely been documented as leopards normally lead their cubs to a kill. In this case she had lost her kill to a hyena before she was able to stash it in a tree, but she was able to feed herself and take some meat back to the cub.
- The Hlambela male has been a regular feature on the northern side of the Sand River. His presence has been made by frequent vocalisations and often his tracks are seen in the middle of the road, a clear sign of who reigns on this side of the river. Although younger than Thamba he almost matches him for size. We look forward to watching his development.

### **Lions**

- The Mhangene Pride continue to blow our guests away with amazing lion viewing. The cubs are extremely comfortable around the vehicles which provide us with plenty of entertainment as they chase and play with one another without a care in the world. We are not absolutely sure on how many there are as there are three different litters that are not always brought out at the same time. We have seen nine around a wildebeest kill and another lioness was seen carrying a single cub on the same day at a different location. The cubs are looking healthy and with full bellies, so this bodes well for their future development.

- One still May afternoon we watched the two Ximungwe lionesses with the Plains Camp lions on Makalashi clearing. One of the males was attempting to mate with the youngest female. At the moment the Sand River has been the ideal refuge for these two females as well as the Nkuhuma lioness and her two older offspring, however with the Talamati Pride are also nearby so conflict will be inevitable.

### **Bush walks**

- As the grass starts to dry and the temperatures stay mild throughout the day walking has been the perfect way to be able to connect with nature and take some time for self-reflection. Just being on your own two feet with the distant sounds of elephants trumpeting or the melodic call of the white-browed robin chat is enough to make one feel enriched by such a simple activity. Spending time with our highly skilled trackers can be so rewarding as the story of what has transpired the night before is revealed through subtle tracks left by creatures great and small. As the light stays low for longer seeing tracks is easier and is a great way to get our guests involved in the process.



### **Bird List**

- The bird list for May includes three new species, bringing our yearly total to 252.

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

## Elephants on the move

Article by Dan Hartman

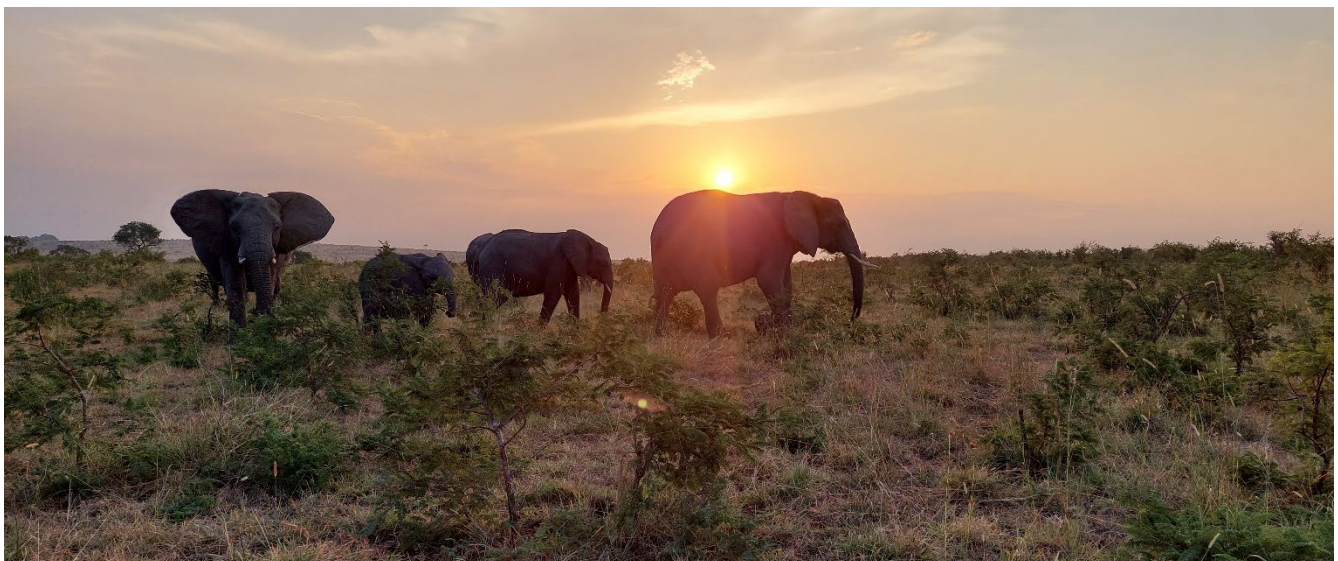


It's no secret that elephants are some of the most reliably entertaining animals to watch, photograph, observe or merely just linger in the presence of whilst out in the wild or on safari. Whether it be trumpeting tantrums amongst ambitious youngsters or mud bathing in mud wallows (often too small to harbour their large bodies), to ongoing, never-ending feeding behaviour to sustain their large ineffective digestive systems, elephants never fail to retain onlookers' attention and often appreciation and respect when viewed at the distances we so often are lucky enough to experience here at Singita Sabi Sand.

With the changing seasons, so comes a change in not only feeding behaviour alone but also geographical movements of the herds. The month of May offers us what one could argue as close to perfect temperatures with days reaching a peak of around 26 degrees Celsius (79 Fahrenheit) and mornings and evenings around 12 degrees Celsius (54 Fahrenheit ). These change in temperatures are coupled with an obvious shortening of the days and with this the marula trees that fruit their tangy yellow fruits (usually around February) shed their leaves as they begin to store their nutrient output and water reserves in their roots until

the first rains to come at year end. This change offers a widely discussed shift in the elephants around the southern part of Kruger National Park and the Sabi Sand Reserve alike. It begins with a slow gradual movement further north and east into the more central/eastern and northern portions of the park where their diet will switch to more grass feeding for several months. It is generally considered that elephants in the north feed more on grass than that of the southern elephants with grass species constituting around 40% of their diet during winter as compared to the southern elephants where grass only forms 10% of their diet in winter.

During these movements, guests, guides and trackers are often offered the most impressive scenes as these sometimes large herds of well over 30 to 40 individuals parade on a mission to get further north and east.



## Amazing walking safari

Article by Coman Mnisi

It was a beautiful afternoon when we decided to do a walk, tracking an animal. While driving to locate tracks we were keeping an eye out specifically for white rhino tracks because there are less risks when spending some time with them on foot due to their poor vision. We headed into the western section of our part of the reserve in the hopes of more activity from animals going back and forth to the river to drink since it had been a warm day.

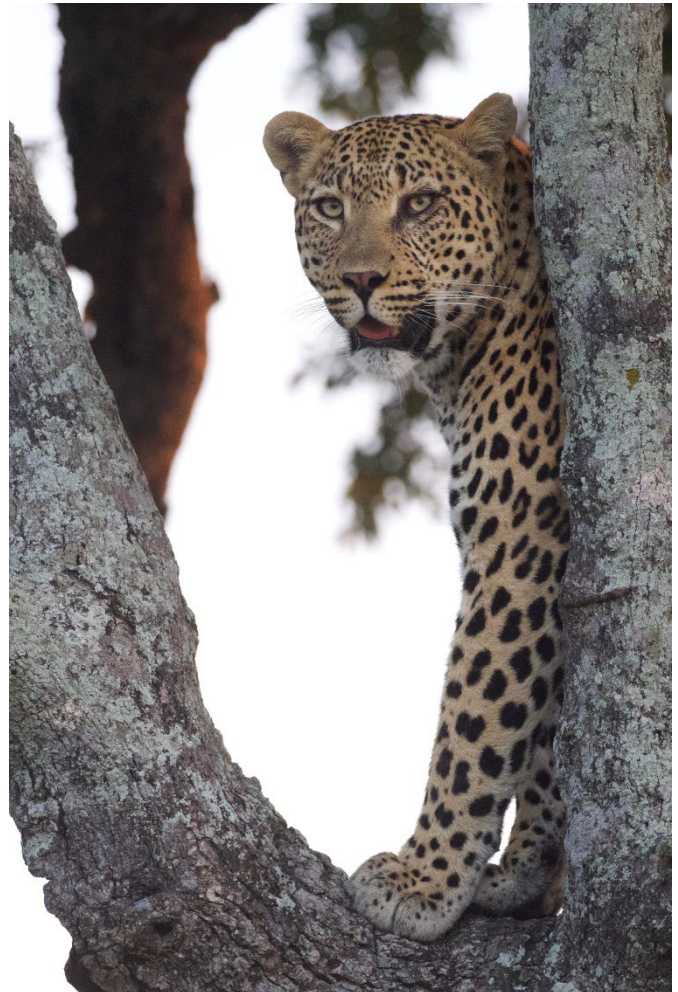
Within 20 minutes of driving we spotted some fresh white rhino tracks crossing the road in a north-easterly direction which was the direction of the river. From the tracks we could see that it was three rhinos - two adults and one youngster, so we then got all the guests off the vehicle to look at the tracks and explained to them all the details of how fresh the tracks looked and the direction. Everybody looked interested and keen to start trailing!

The tracking was not too easy because the rhinos walked through long grass. We just had to use our experience of checking the bare ground to see if they had walked past there, also in small wet patches. Luckily we found the tracks again that led us straight to the river. We arrived at the river, and we stood by the riverbank to scan around as we had lost the tracks again. Eventually one of the guests spotted a buffalo bull lying in the riverbed, so relaxed and not even paying attention to us. We moved on not too far from where the buffalo bull was and we heard something grazing so I stopped the guests to make sure they could all hear the sound. Then they saw me smiling because I knew it could only be one animal that produces that sound when feeding. Before we could even start approaching to see the rhinos I started checking the direction of the wind so that we could approach into the wind direction without them detecting our scent. It was along the riverbank where we finally had the best view of the three rhinos feeding, as per the tracks.

We all remained silent just to listen to one of the biggest mammals feeding less than 30 metres away from us. It was very exciting and on some level it became very emotional. While enjoying the rhinos we heard water splashing behind us in the river so we all turned around to look - it was an elephant bull that was drinking nearby. We had an advantage of the high riverbank to see him clearly as well as having the sunset light shining on his face, it was a good photographic opportunity and very exciting.

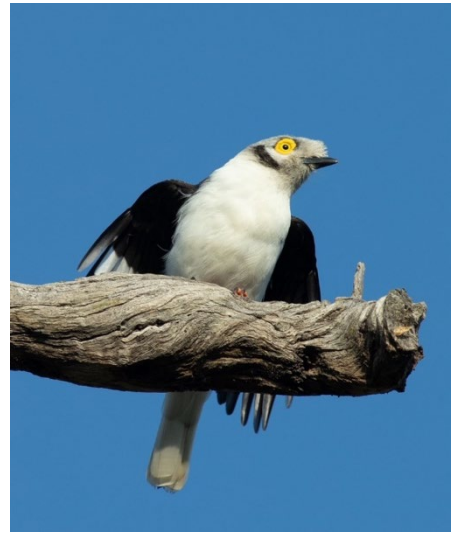
We could have stayed longer in that area but because the sun was starting to go down, we had to start making our way back to where we had our vehicle parked, and we all arrived at the vehicle safely and drove back to the lodge. What an incredible experience to safely see three of the Big Five on foot.

May Gallery



The Hlambela male leopard. Images by Marc Bowes-Taylor and Matt Durell.  
A cheeky Mhangene cub photographed by Marc Bowes-Taylor.





A white-headed vulture. There are an estimated 500 pairs left in South Africa. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.  
African green pigeons can be seen warming up in trees before searching for small fruits. Image by Matt Durell.  
A white-crested helmetsrike about to follow the rest of the flock. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.

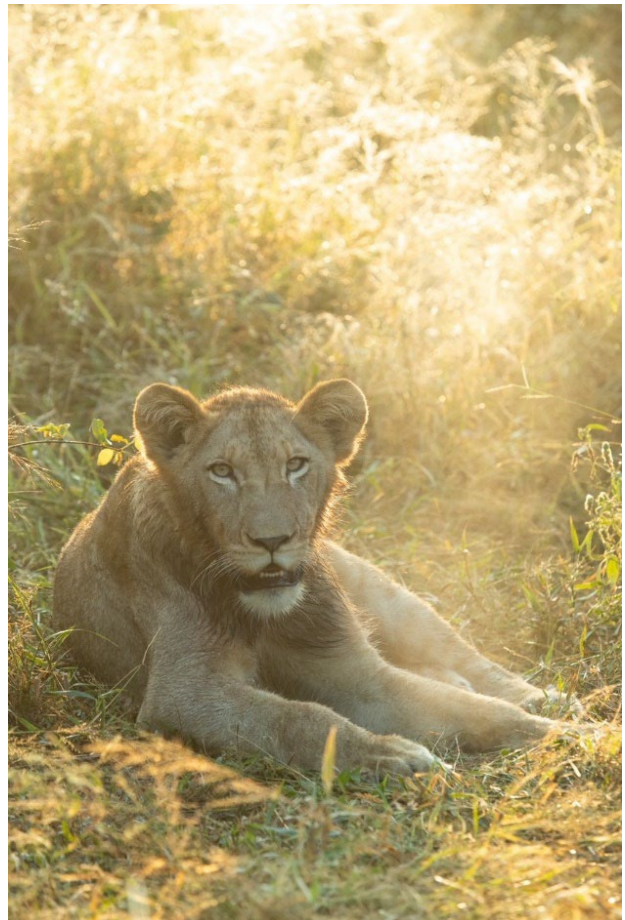


The Mhangene cubs having been providing memorable moments for our guests. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor



A leopard watching over a herd of impala unbeknown to them. Image by Matt Durell.





Some of the young male lions that have been in different parts of the reserve at the moment, one of the Nsevu lions (left) and the Nkuhuma lion (right). Images by Matt Durell and Marc Bowes-Taylor.