

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 17°C (62.6°F)

Average maximum: 27°C (80.6°F)

Minimum recorded: 11°C (51.8°F)

Maximum recorded: 35°C (95.0°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 162.8 mm

For the season to date: 689.1 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:09

Sunset: 17:40

Just as we were beginning to believe that the rain season was coming to an end where the hues of yellow settled in and the leaves floated down toward the earth, a blanket of grey wrapped around the land and brought with it a fresh flush of energizing green and the waterholes filled once again.

From all corners, day and night, one can hear the gurgling and snorting of rutting impala rams who are in the full swing of their mating season which allows us to feel as if there is a constant motion and little stillness. It is a beautiful energy, one filled with excitement as we start to breathe in the cold air in the morning and set out on game drive, searching for the wonders of the wilderness through the mystifying mist...

Here's a Sightings Snapshot for April:

Lions

- We have had some incredible lion viewing throughout April with a constant being the two Plains Camp males, who each night echo their roars out into the heavy cool air. They truly have placed themselves well as the dominant male lions of Singita Sabi Sand and have done everything they can to make sure of the safety of the Nkuhuma lionesses and their cubs.
- With that there also comes some tragedy with the finding of the body of one of the Talamati lionesses (believed to be the tailless female, due to her no longer being viewed with the pride). It is unknown exactly what the cause of her death was, however the Plains Camp males had stolen a zebra carcass from the three young Nsevu males, and a lioness was seen moving onto the scene and being chased off by the two males. It is only speculation but due to us viewing a lioness being chased by the Plains Camp males, we think it was perhaps them that ended her life.
- The Nkuhuma lionesses are doing extremely well and looking in great condition. It also seems as if the amber-eyed female is heavily pregnant so we look forward to hopefully welcoming some youngsters to their new found pride.
- It seems as if the Mhangene Pride have been laying low now for quite some time in the southern parts of the reserve, however, one of the older lionesses has been seen on multiple occasions with the Plains Camp males. We have viewed her mating with the bigger of the two males and wonder if she won't eventually draw the pride back into these areas. For now the Nkuhuma females are keeping them well at bay.

Elephants

- With the late rains falling mid-April, we enjoyed some spectacular elephant viewing where multiple trees were pushed over to feed on, and the large pachyderms used the soft soils to their advantage, digging for roots and bulbs. There has also been an incredible amount of baby elephants seen and it is always a joy to watch them as they explore their new surroundings.

Leopards

- We are beginning to feel a huge shift in the leopard dynamics at the moment and it would seem that the days of the Nyeleti male are numbered. On multiple occasions closer to the end of this month, the Thamba male has been seen moving right up and into the Ebony and Boulders camp perimeter where we have never viewed him before. One morning we watched as Nyeleti male and Thamba male walk right through the western parts of the property and up to the areas just south of the lodges, growling at each other, vocalising and scent marking. With no physical fight taking place, we believe the two males are only sizing one another up and the Thamba male is becoming more confident in his approach toward claiming a larger area.
- With the movements of the Thamba male being more centred around the territory of the Schotia female, we are starting to wonder about the safety of her single female cub. As of late we have only viewed the Schotia female on her own so it is unknown as to whether she has the cub very well hidden or if indeed the Thamba male has taken its life.
- After weeks of viewing the Nkuwa female with suckle marks and signs of having cubs, we finally managed to view them! On the most beautiful rock, nestled high above the Mobeni and Xmobonyana River confluence, two little spotted fur balls made an appearance with their mother, and since then we have had some magnificent viewing of the three cats. We hope to continue enjoying watching their growth with their first-time mother.

Buffalo

- Buffalo viewing this month has continued to be extraordinary with large herds in all corners of the property moving through the area. It truly is a wonderful sight to just sit and take in the sheer number of animals and to watch as they go about their day. One morning we viewed a herd of over three hundred

buffalo crossing the Sand River to the west of Ebony and both the sight and intense sound were incredible to witness.

Cheetah

- Although scarce in number, we have had some wonderful cheetah viewing this month and been able to treat our guests to one of the rarest big cat species in our area.

Bird List

The bird list for April included 14 new bird species with a sighting of a purple heron being the highlight. This brings our yearly total to 254.



A precious new arrival to Singita Sabi Sand – see the story of its first encounter with guides and guests.

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

An unforgettable moment

Article by Marc Bowes-Taylor

We are truly blessed with being in the heart of some of the best wildlife viewing areas on the continent. Unforgettable sightings seem to stack up quite quickly over the years on Singita Sabi Sand. This one will be right up there with one of the best, especially considering the state of the world's rhino populations.

The shoulder seasons, like autumn, give you the feeling that things are resetting and coming to a calm after the heat and rain of the summer. It also offers some incredible weather, when the winds drop and clear skies are a common sight. This sort of weather is ideal rhino viewing weather as their hearing and sense of smell is not impaired by the wind, making them more comfortable around vehicles.

On one such afternoon we were notified of a mother rhino and her calf, probably around three or four weeks of age. They slowly made their way down to the banks of the Sand River where some of their favourite species highly palatable and fibrous grass species grow.

When approaching a mother and calf it's all about patience - approach from a distance and pay attention to any change in their behaviour, as you do not want to spook them causing them unnecessary stress which may lead them to go crashing through the bush away from the vehicle. Our patience paid off and we managed a view of the two among some buffalo thorn thicket. The mother seemed undisturbed by us and calmly fed with her calf just a few metres away from not just one vehicle, but two! Looking at our guests' reactions was so heart-warming. What was even more special was the trust from the female rhino. Unknowing to her, her species is in dire situation as rhino poaching in Africa is showing no sign of slowing down. She had complete trust in us and fortunately Singita has her back. Our dedicated K9 unit ensure that her and her calf will be protected for years to come.

We sat in complete awe, every mouthful of grass, every squeal and squeak from her milk-thirsty calf making us giggle with joy. This is what it's about - sitting and appreciating. The best part of it all was leaving the two of them undisturbed by our presence. We look forward to watching the little calf grow and hopefully inspire and spread the message of conservation.



Death of an unsuspecting hyena

Article by Paul Josop

We crossed north over the Sand River and decided to explore the western side of Othawa. It wasn't too long before Emmanuel spotted fresh tracks of two lionesses heading north, towards one of the waterholes. As we followed the tracks they took us past the waterhole, and this is when Emmanuel and I assumed that the felines were making their way straight to the centre of the property. At the centre, two days before, we had encountered the Hosana male leopard hunting and killing an impala ram. We had watched him hoist it in a marula tree and knew that he hadn't been disturbed by any other predators during the two days.

Putting my foot to the pedal to get to the area, we arrived to find a different leopard in the marula tree, the kill not in position and two hyena clan members nervously surveying the ground below! As I scanned the area to our east, I saw one lioness emerging from the treeline and we followed her with the vehicle. She led us through some bushwillow and silver cluster-leaf trees as she sniffed around but then returned to the marula where the kill was originally.

The unknown leopard had miraculously disappeared, and a female hyena had located the remains of the impala's head and ran off with it! Surprisingly, another smaller hyena, obviously driven by the scent of the kill thought it could also find a morsel, but its fate would be very different.

The lioness that was now in the open and locking eyes on the hyena started stalking the scavenger! A slight change in the hyena's movement made us believe that it had seen the lioness, but it again progressed towards her. With an unexpected charge the lioness caught the unsuspecting hyena, grabbed it with her claws, bit into its scruff and then secured a grip under its neck and twisted its head around.

It all happened quickly, and the hyena was very vocal but soon was doomed when the second lioness arrived and attacked it. Once the hyena was dead the lionesses let go of its body, sniffed it for a few seconds and moved off to a thicket to lie down.



All photographs taken by Adrian Steirn



To spot or not...

Article by Andries Mohlala

Wanting to spot wildlife seems to be a force buried deep into our human souls. There's not a technologies in the world that cannot touch it! As we all take our seats in the game viewer, our focus becomes synchronized in one pursuit, in the place of miracles. Competition to spot and claim points for being the first to spot is rife! We all want to beat the professional tracker who occupies the best seat to see it all, on the bonnet of the vehicle. For a guide to spot anything is a bit of a challenge because we tend to concentrate more on driving, communicating with our guests and listening to the radio feed while the tracker tries to separate bush from animal. So, when the guide shouts, "Animal!" or any one of the guests spot anything, the tracker might be surprised that he missed a sighting. The first thing he does is look behind to see where we are pointing.

On a particular afternoon drive, I spotted a honey badger that was running along the sandy river bank. I just happened to be looking in that direction and there it was - but the trouble was no one saw it but me. Honey badgers don't have the best of reputations, to say the least, and because it went behind some river reeds no one could view it, and it was not moving.

My tracker challenged me to prove what I claimed to have seen. It would have been easier for him to have just let it go, but he needed proof that I saw a honey badger! I was thinking to myself, "Who in their right minds wants to go on foot and find a honey badger, an animal rumoured to go for a man's genitalia and rip them off of your body rendering you sexless?". I needed time to consider what we were about to do, but my tracker was already off the vehicle and looking me straight in the eye!

I had the upper hand, as I knew where it was hiding. So, I let him march off into the reeds and flush it out. Let me just say that running in deep sand away from a snappy honey badger is not so funny, unless you are viewing the scene!

The Singita old guard

By Damin Dallas

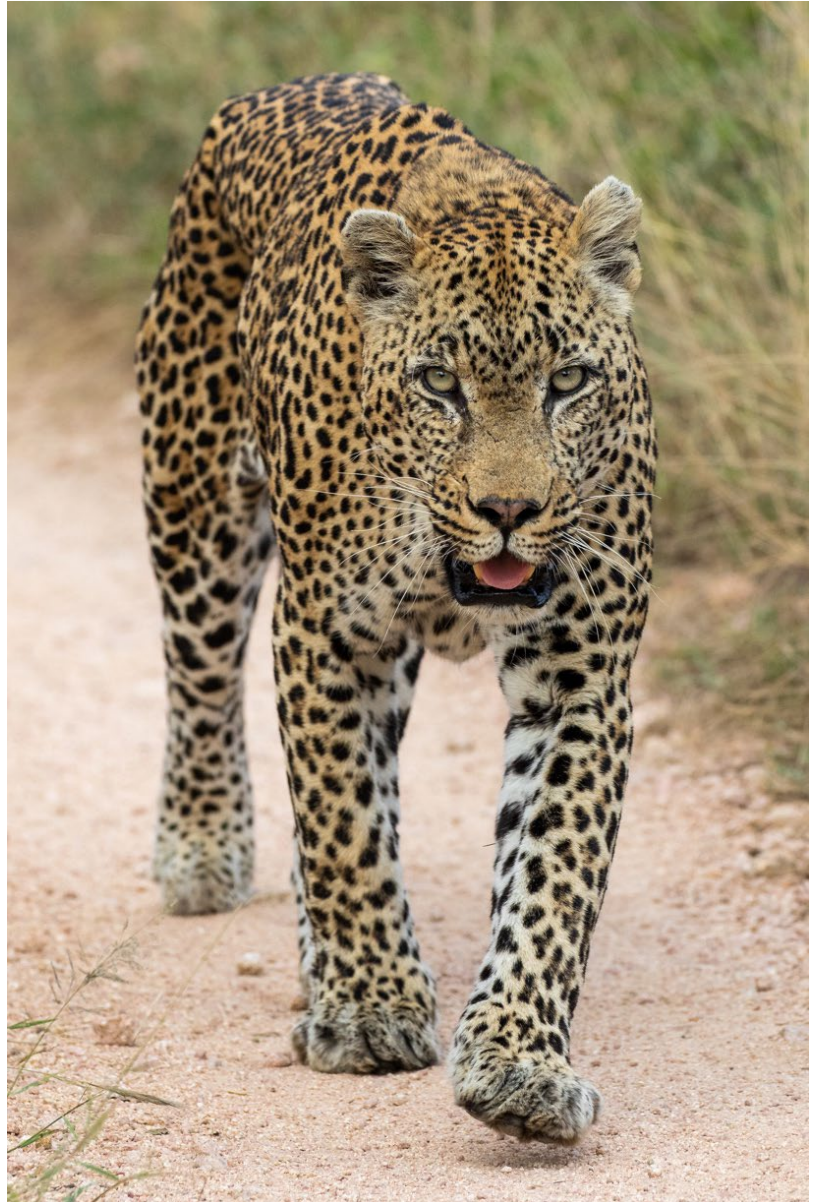


It is well known that the Sabi Sand provides incredible and frequent leopard sightings, and an individual that guests have a good chance of encountering when visiting Singita Sabi Sand is the Nyeleti male leopard. Being a regular visitor to the northern Sabi Sand, I had the privilege of viewing the Nyeleti male when he was just a small cub back in 2009, and got to watch as both he and his two littermates grew to independent individuals. It would be a long time until I saw the Nyeleti male again as he dispersed from his natal area towards Singita where he pushed out the Kashane male leopard and set up territory of his own.

One can only imagine my excitement when I joined the Singita family knowing that I would get to see this male again, now as a large dominant leopard. I have enjoyed three years of excellent regular viewing of this male and it amazes me how good he is still looking given his age. At 13 years old, Nyeleti male is the oldest individual we view here at Singita but his excellent condition, size and mobility wouldn't suggest he is in his 'final years'.

A clear indicator however, of him being an older male, is the fact that his territory has shrunk significantly over the last year. Having held a large area around the Singita lodges and far to the west of Singita, this territory has shrunk to about half the size of what it was two years ago. The Nyeleti male is being pinched in and pressured by three young, large male leopards - the Thamba male to the south, the Hosana male to the north and the Euphorbia male to the west.

Through combined research between Singita and Panthera we have been able to determine territory sizes for each leopard and, at the time of the findings, the Nyeleti male's territory was at 21 km² which is less than half of that of the Thamba male which was around 47.4 km².



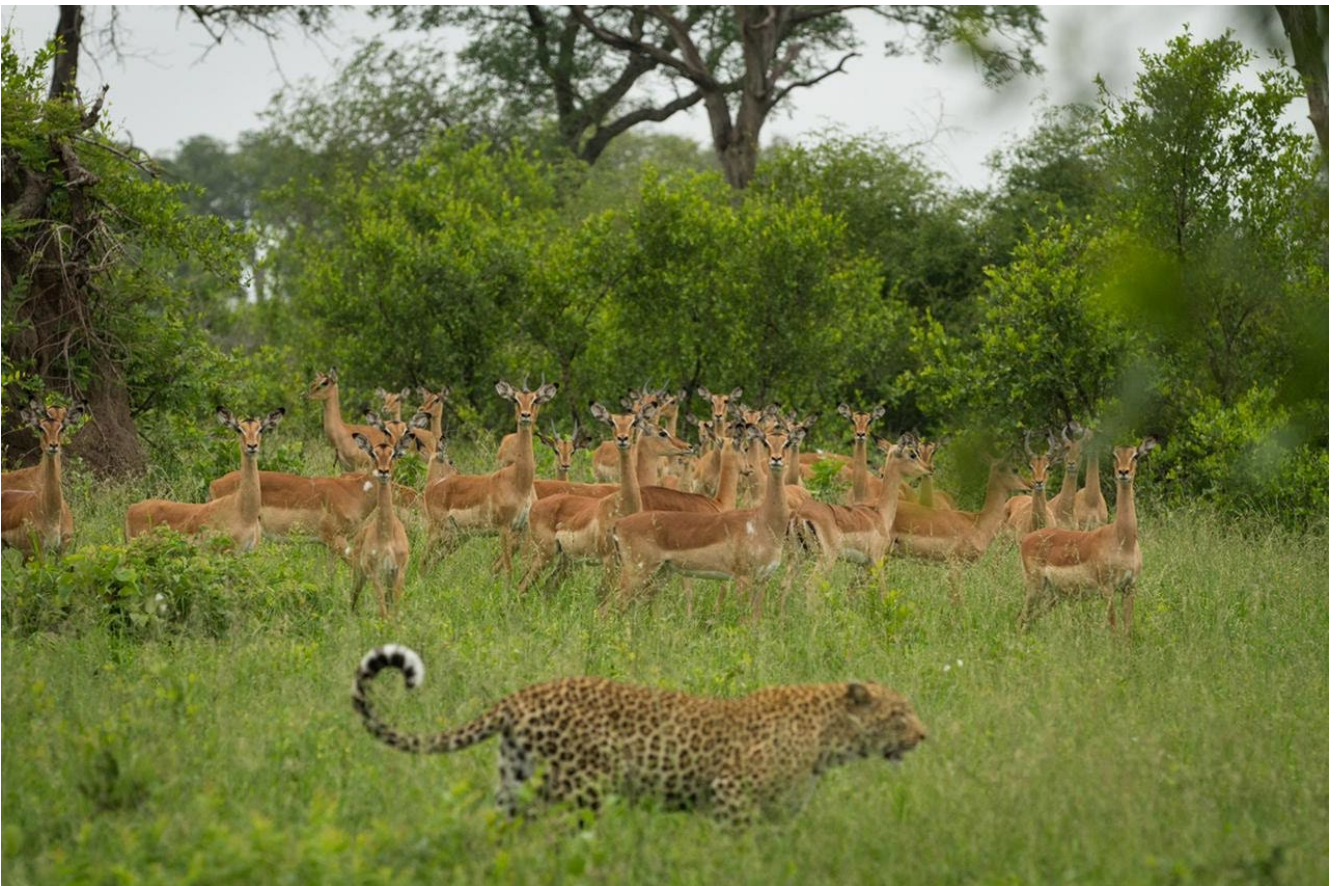
The biggest threat to the Nyeleti male is the Thamba male who we are regularly seeing push more and more into the southern parts of Nyeleti's territory. Frequent encounters between these males have been recorded and Nyeleti has run from his younger adversary every time.

I fear it is only a matter of time before we see Nyeleti forced out and become a nomadic male. It's hard to predict when that time will come and for now, he is still a large and powerful leopard and has definitely defied the 'norm' of a leopard of his age. I do hope he is able to hold on especially seeing as the Schotia female currently has a young female cub who, if she reaches independence, will add to a long list of individuals who will one day carry on the legacy of that of the Nyeleti male.

April Gallery



Cape clawless otter and giant kingfisher – Photograph by Marc Eschenlohr.



Leopard passing a very concerned herd of impala – Photograph by Nick Du Plessis.



The playful hippo at Xnomkombana Pan – Photograph by Nick Du Plessis.



Breeding herd of elephants passing the guests on game drive – Photograph by Claude Visagie.



Crash of rhino enjoying a mud wallow – Photograph by Nick Du Plessis.



Baby elephant – Photograph by Nick Du Plessis.