

Singita



Elephants wallowing – Photo by Monika Malewski

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

Temperature

Average minimum: 19.8°C (67.6°F)
Minimum recorded: 16.0°C (60.8°F)
Average maximum: 30.2°C (86.3°F)
Maximum recorded: 39.0°C (102.2°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 66 mm
Season to date: 128 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sept)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 04h55
Sunset: 18h20

November has arrived with a fresh burst of life. What started as just a few green leaves and the odd patch of new grass quickly turned into a full transformation and within days, the bushwillows, raisin bushes, and *Terminalias* exploded with bright, almost glowing green leaves, as if they'd been waiting all winter for their moment. Ground lilies, paintbrush lilies, and a scatter of wildflowers now add splashes of colour to the landscape. But what really gets us excited at this time of year are the first impala lambs. Those long-legged, wide-eyed little ones are wobbling about everywhere now, the very best sign that summer has truly arrived.

A Sightings Snapshot for November follows:

Lions

When the prides have been on the property, the viewing has been excellent.

- The Shish Pride has been lingering just west of our concession, and on several crisp early mornings we've found them along the H6 on our way to the lodge. The sub-adult males are really starting to fill out now - broad-shouldered, confident, and taking on the regal shape of their fathers.
- The Sonop males have been busy patrolling between the northern and central regions, moving fluidly between the Chava Pride and three of the Mananga lionesses.
- The Chava pride themselves spent much of the month on the grassy plains east of Gudzane Dam, where controlled burns earlier in the season (part of SanParks' fire management plan) have given way to a soft carpet of new green after the rains. The fresh growth has drawn in all their favoured prey, and each week we've watched kettles of vultures rising and settling over the blocks, signs of a landscape rich with activity. The Chava lions are in strong condition, all except one cub with an injured front leg, are round-bellied and lively, often seen mock-fighting as they sharpen the skills they'll need one day.
- When the Mananga Pride moved through our concession, we had several clear views of them watching, stalking, and chasing giraffe - unsuccessful attempts, but still great opportunities to watch these big cats at work.

Leopards

Leopard sightings are more elusive at this time because the landscape has transformed into a lush oasis. With puddles of water scattered everywhere, their prey has dispersed across the area, reducing the need for leopards to congregate near the usual water sources. At the same time, these agile cats are exceptionally well-equipped to remain unseen; their incredible rosetted coats allow them to blend seamlessly into the dense greenery, hiding in plain sight even when they are close by.

- The Nhlangueni female offered a truly memorable sighting as she lay draped across a picturesque dead leadwood right beside the road, her limbs elegantly hanging over the branches as she shifted occasionally in the soft morning light. When a group of waterbuck wandered into view, she sat up on a lower thicker branch to assess the opportunity, only to decide the prey was larger than she preferred; with effortless grace, she melted back into her original position. Reports then came over the radio that three Mananga lionesses were slowly making their way down the road toward us, prompting a wait filled with anticipation about the potential interaction between these powerful predators. After about half an hour, with the temperature steadily rising, the lionesses settled beneath a *Terminalia* tree only fifty meters from the leopardess, still resting in her leadwood perch, but now fully alert to their presence, while the lionesses remained completely oblivious to hers. Nhlangueni waited patiently until the lionesses lowered their heads to rest, then slipped silently from the tree and, keeping her body low, slinked away into the long grass.

African wild dogs

- Wild dog sightings in November have been both exciting and sobering. The small pack of three adults and five pups that has been moving through the central regions during the first half of the month is now down to only two pups; a stark reminder of how high pup mortality is in this area. With numerous predators, including lions, hyenas, and even leopards, competing intensely for resources, and with dens often vulnerable during the rainy season, young wild dogs face immense pressure in their first few months of life. After roaming widely early in the month, the pack disappeared for about a week as the rains set in.
- Mid-month, a second pack was discovered in the far north near the Mozambican border, an extraordinary group of 26 individuals made up of 20 adults and six pups. As part of ongoing wild dog conservation within the Greater Kruger National Park and the Associated Private Nature Reserves,

NGOs maintain a detailed database of known packs, and this impressive northern pack had not yet been recorded. That afternoon, Kruger Park veterinarians and conservationists were able to collar one of the adults, a crucial step in monitoring the pack's movements. Collaring allows researchers to track dispersal patterns, locate den-sites, respond quickly to injuries or snaring incidents, and manage population genetics by ensuring that packs remain diverse and well-connected across the ecosystem, key elements in safeguarding the long-term survival of this endangered species.

- Towards the end of the month, we were excited to confirm the presence of a third pack in the area - three adults accompanied by six lively pups. Over the past week, we've enjoyed near-daily sightings of them as they moved along the N'wanetsi River and down toward the granophytes, often offering wonderful viewing opportunities. They've been hunting consistently, focusing mostly on impala, and their teamwork has been a privilege to watch. One morning in particular stood out, when the adults led a swift, coordinated chase and successfully brought down two lambs, giving us a remarkable glimpse into both their efficiency as hunters and the pups' early lessons in pack life.

Elephants

- Elephant sightings in November have been nothing short of extraordinary, at times it has felt as though they are absolutely everywhere. On some drives, we encountered more elephants than even the ubiquitous impala, despite the surge of new lambs dotting the landscape. Around nearly every corner, we found ourselves face to face with another group: large herds of relaxed females shepherding tiny, wobbling calves; boisterous teenagers testing their confidence; and, every so often, a massive bull trailing calmly behind the family. Their constant presence has added a magnificent, almost immersive quality to the month's game viewing.

Spotted hyenas

- Spotted hyena sightings for the month of November have taken on a noticeably different pattern as the dynamics within the clans shift with the season. All the previously active den-sites are now empty, the cubs having reached independence and begun moving confidently alongside the adults instead of remaining hidden away. With no den-bound youngsters anchoring the clans to specific territories, the hyenas have become far more nomadic, and most of this month's sightings have been of single individuals roaming the roads under the cover of darkness. These solitary night-time wanderers, likely on patrol or searching for feeding opportunities, highlight the fluid and wide-ranging nature of hyena movements.

Buffalos

- In recent weeks, we've gone from seeing almost no buffalo at all to enjoying near-daily sightings, often of more than one herd moving across our concession. With the arrival of fresh grazing and more reliable water sources after a challenging dry season, the buffalo are beginning to look noticeably healthier. Their coats appear glossier, their condition improved, and the herds are once again full of movement and energy. Numerous calves can now be seen tucked among the adults, and a few cows are showing clear signs of pregnancy - promising indicators that the herds are recovering well from the tough conditions and entering a far more productive season.

Plains game

- After the welcome rains, the burnt blocks of the N'wanetsi Concession have transformed into a lush green carpet, drawing hundreds of zebra and wildebeest to feast on the fresh growth.
- The arrival of impala lambs has added an extra sense of vibrancy to the landscape, while the male impalas - completely overwhelmed by the surge of hormones, have slipped into a dramatic false rut. Their loud snorts and the sharp clashing of horns echo through the bush, adding excitement to every game drive.

- In general, most of the plains game seem to have an extra spring in their step now that water and food are no longer so hard to find, making this a wonderfully dynamic time in the concession.

Rare animals and other sightings

- On night drives the narrow beam of the spotlight and headlights limits what we can safely and ethically view. We avoid shining directly on diurnal species, and even with nocturnal animals we keep disturbance to a minimum, allowing the light to reflect softly off their bodies rather than into their eyes. Yet every so often, the bush offers an unforgettable surprise. One particular evening, one of our guides struck pure nocturnal gold: first a caracal hunting quelea, then a serval resting calmly beside the vehicle, followed by two busy honey badgers - and finally, our resident pride of lions completing an extraordinary sequence of sightings!

Birds

Bird sightings have been especially rewarding this month, marked by both seasonal arrivals and unexpected rarities.

- The first woodland kingfisher, a species eagerly anticipated each summer, was spotted on the morning of the 15th, and, to the delight of the guiding team, successfully photographed as proof for the annual guides-and-trackers betting competition!
- Along the river crossings, both white-backed and black-crowned night herons have been seen frequently; these sightings are particularly special because these secretive birds are typically shy, preferring dense riverine vegetation and emerging mostly at dusk or dawn, making reliable daytime views uncommon.
- Adding to the excitement, several rarities have graced the area this month, including the spotted flycatcher, the striking blue-cheeked bee-eaters, and even a Montagu's harrier.

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

Something we drive past every day in the African bush, and something that at once stands out to anyone visiting this wilderness for the first time, is the vast amounts of very large piles of dung. This mainly belongs to elephants. Elephants can consume up to 150 kg (300 lbs) of vegetation per day. This, combined with a fast and inefficient digestive system, results in vast amounts of dung.

To a newcomer, elephant dung is usually associated with a foul smell and a sense of disgust. But to me, and, often, to others once they are introduced to the idea, it has a surprisingly sweet scent, one that is distinct to the African bush. This large amount of dung plays a vital role in the distribution of seeds and nutrients as elephants travel vast distances every day, carrying what they have eaten along with them. Undigested seeds then get deposited far away from the parent plant, and nutrients carried within fertilise the soil.

Upon closer inspection, of a pile of elephant dung may reveal quite the surprise, and a whole soap opera plays out on this unexpected stage. Organisms have come to learn that there are many pickings on these deposits and within minutes of them landing, the area comes alive. Observing for a few minutes reveals a whole ecosystem that relies on these deposits. Some acts play out immediately and some take months to complete the cycle.



The first act that we usually notice is the dramatic arrival of the dung beetles. These large beetles have captured our interest from the beginning of time, and they collect and store the dung to function as a stored food source for their larvae, often underground. Male dung beetles roll the dung into balls many times their size and are then chosen by females who will lay eggs on the balls as they are buried. Some dung beetles specialise in stealing the dung balls from others, and this leads to miniature gladiator fights playing out. This can be most entertaining to watch!

Take a closer look and you may notice some sweat bees, gnats, or even a butterfly or two landing on the dung pile. These little insects rely heavily on salt deposits and a source of nitrogen, which they can lap up from a fresh pile of dung. Swarms of little gnats sometimes form a continuous cloud around the dung, all making the most of the short-lived opportunity while it is still damp.

Often unexpected, spiders are attracted to the scent of the dung. Crab and wolf spiders, as well as the personable jumping spiders, show up and often defend the pile from same-species intruders. With the arrival of the gnats and flies, a dung pile becomes a buffet for the taking for these little opportunists. Close inspection can often reveal many spiders scattered across or nearby on the floor.

Once the dung dries a little, usually after a day or so, the boluses are often broken up by the activity of the dung beetles. Eggs of all kinds of invertebrates are laid in the pile of semi-digested plant material. Guineafowl and francolins show up to have a scratch through the dung for any missed seeds or even a juicy bug of sorts hiding away. Hornbills do the same, flipping over pieces of the dung with their large bills. Starlings and waxbills add to the bird groups that make use of this resource.

Millipedes are detritivores (eating decomposing plant material) and are abundant after rains. They are found close to elephant dung in summer. They have a few specialised predators that are not deterred by their poison content, and civets have been noted to shuffle through the dung piles in search of them. One may be lucky to find a large, shiny black ant around, comically named a “ringbum millipede muncher”. These specialise in eating the smaller millipedes often found in dung piles.

Some weeks after the dung has dried up, one may find an animal has kicked over a pile that had been sitting, seemingly unattended. A closer look may reveal that what you’re looking at, is merely a ball of mud where once was a ball of dung. The bolus is hollowed out by termites, and all that stays is the thin layer exposed to the sun, and a latticework of mud inside acting as a scaffold system for the entire removal of the content. The termites could later become targets for baboons, francolins or hornbills looking for an easy source of protein.

What one does not see, is the spread of microscopic spores of fungus through the wind. These mushroom and fungus spores can sometimes remain dormant for years until conditions allow them to grow and break down materials that had not been decomposed. Upon the arrival of the first rains, these spores that landed on old elephant dung deposits often sprout, and suddenly one morning, mushrooms appear. Isolated and on only a select few piles of dung, they are an eye-catcher. They are the last call for the dung that escaped every other onslaught.

The mushrooms are only the fruiting bodies of a much larger organism that works tirelessly to break down organic matter and return nutrients to the soil, allowing the next plant to grow—and eventually become the next elephant’s meal.

Taking a closer look reveals that there is a lot more to a pile of “disgusting” dung than may meet the eye...

The early mornings at Singita Kruger National Park have a way of reminding you how alive this landscape truly is. Before the first rumble of a game viewer rolls out of the lodge, the world belongs to creatures that move silently, none more so than the snakes that glide through our grasslands, riverbeds, and riverine thickets. Although guests typically arrive dreaming of lions, elephants, and of course the ever-enigmatic leopard, it's the smaller, colder-blooded residents that often tell some of the most fascinating ecological stories.

Our concession hosts an impressive diversity of snakes, some of which we commonly encounter:

- African rock python – Africa's largest snake and a true ecosystem engineer, often found near waterholes or drainage lines.
- Black mamba – Fast, alert, and deeply misunderstood, usually avoiding open confrontation unless threatened.
- Mozambique spitting cobra – A regular nocturnal wanderer around our camps and one of the most adaptable species in the Lowveld.
- Puff adder – Masters of camouflage and responsible for most snakebites in southern Africa, primarily because people step on them accidentally.
- Boomslang – A slender, stunning tree-dweller with exceptional eyesight and a calm nature unless provoked.



These snakes, and more, play crucial roles in controlling rodent populations, supporting raptors, and maintaining the balance of life in the savanna. Snakes are often feared because they behave in ways unfamiliar to us. As ectothermic (cold-blooded) animals, their behaviour is governed largely by temperature. They bask to warm up, seek shade to cool down, and conserve energy whenever possible. They are *not* aggressive hunters searching for humans to bite; their instinct is always to remain hidden or escape. Most species will rather flee than stand their ground - yet mythology and fear often paint a very different picture.

It's remarkable how deeply the idea of a "snake attack" is ingrained in people. But ask any guide or herpetologist: snakes do not attack humans. They *defend themselves*. Nearly every bite reported involves a snake that was stepped on, grabbed, cornered, or otherwise pushed into a situation where it had no alternative. The bad reputation comes from a mix of cultural stories, dramatic media portrayals, and a very human fear of the unknown. But when viewed through an ecological lens, as predators, prey, and nutrient recyclers, snakes emerge as some of the most important animals in our system.

In many rural communities bordering protected areas, snakes are widely feared and often associated with witchcraft, omens, or curses. These beliefs run deep and can lead to the immediate killing of any snake seen near a homestead. While these traditions hold cultural significance, they also contribute to huge declines in snake populations, declines that go largely unnoticed compared to the loss of more charismatic species. Education and respectful dialogue are essential in helping these communities understand that snakes are not malevolent forces but integral parts of the Lowveld's natural heritage.

Every year, thousands of snakes are killed on roads, most unintentionally, some deliberately. As guides, we've all driven past the flattened remains of a puff adder or whip snake on the tar and felt that quiet sadness that seems to pass unnoticed by the world. Meanwhile, if a leopard, for instance, is hit by a vehicle, the news spreads like wildfire. Social media erupts! Entire conversations revolve around road safety, ecological impact, and responsible driving. And yet, statistically, snakes die by the thousands with barely a whisper of recognition. This imbalance in awareness says much about our conservation priorities, and how difficult it can be for the public to connect emotionally with the animals that don't have fur, spots, or amber eyes.

This month, our team at Singita Kruger National Park had the privilege of participating in a professional snake-handling and snake-identification course. For many of us, it was an exciting opportunity, not just to deepen our knowledge, but to become safer, more competent custodians of the concession. Proper handling skills allow us to:

- safely relocate snakes found in lodge areas,
- educate guests more confidently and accurately,
- contribute to a culture of respect rather than fear,
- and expand conservation awareness beyond the "Big Five."

The course also highlights something profound: when guides become advocates for these misunderstood creatures, the ripple effect spreads to guests, colleagues, and communities.

Working here at Singita gives us the chance to observe both the obvious and the often-overlooked wildlife, from a lion's roar to a python quietly moving across the sand. Snakes are part of the intricate mosaic that makes the Kruger landscape so rich, so wild, and so worth protecting. May we keep working to change outdated ideas, correct misunderstandings, and ensure these important animals receive the consideration they deserve -whether we encounter them on the roads or in the bush.



November Gallery

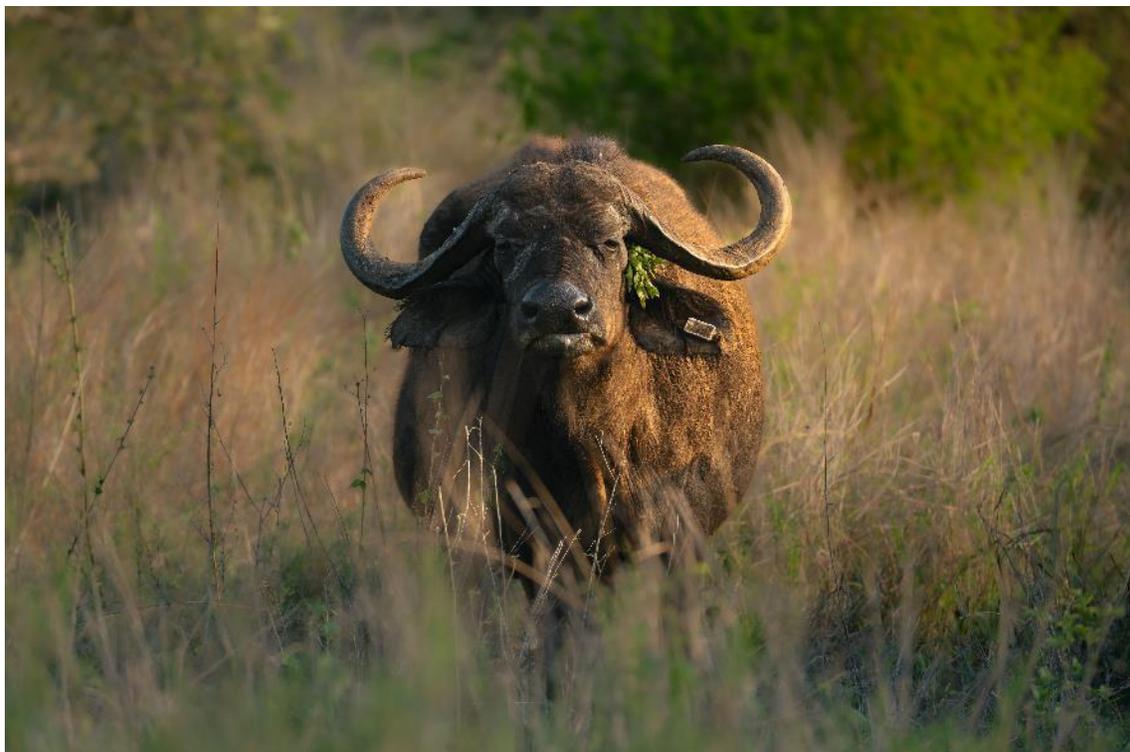


Vervet monkey – Photo by Monika Malewski



Male saddle-billed stork – Photo by Monika Malewski

African buffalo – Photo by Monika Malewski





Large-spotted genet – Photo by Monika Malewski



Ground lily – Photo by Brian Rode

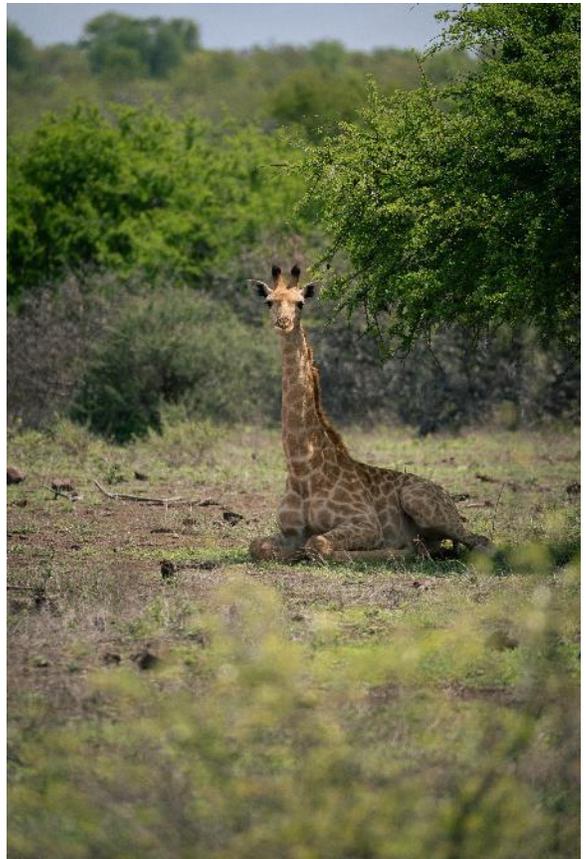


Zamani male leopard – Photo by Monika Malewski

Karomia speciosa – Photo by Chantelle Rode



Young giraffe – Photo by Monika Malewski





Citrus swallow-tail butterfly – Photo by Brian Rode

Pack of African Wild Dogs – Photo by Monika Malewski





Bushveld rain frog – Photo by Brian Rode



Stiletto snake eating a writhing skink – Photo by Brian Rode

Crinum lily – Photo by Brian Rode

