

Singita



Dumbana and cub – Photo by Monika Dallas

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

Temperature

Average minimum: °17.3°C° (63.1°F)
Minimum recorded: °13.0°C° (55.4°F)
Average maximum: °29.0°C° °(84.3°F)
Maximum recorded: 38.0°C° (100.4°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 21 mm
Season to date: 1420 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sept)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:35
Sunset: 17:45

September unfolded beautifully across the wild landscapes of Singita Kruger National Park, bringing with it an exceptional month of wildlife encounters and the first signs of the season's renewal. Elephants were a constant and captivating presence, moving in great numbers across the concession, while all three lion prides made memorable appearances. There were also some remarkable predator interactions, those rare, unscripted moments in the bush that could rival even the finest wildlife documentary. And then came the rain, softening the landscape and awakening the earth, with delicate wildflowers beginning to emerge and add their own touches of colour to the bushveld. It was a month that captured the beauty, drama and quiet transformation of the wild.

A Sightings Snapshot for September follows:

Lions

- Four members of the Mananga Pride spent the beginning of the month around our central areas, providing us with some wonderful opportunities to spend time with these impressive cats. On one occasion, we came across the pride feeding on the remains of an impala carcass. From the condition of the carcass and the behaviour of the lions, it appeared that they had not made the kill themselves but had managed to steal it from another predator, most likely a leopard. These opportunistic moments are always fascinating to witness, as they give us a glimpse into the constant competition and interactions that take place between the predators in our area. Over the following few days, the lions themselves disappeared, leaving us only their tracks to tell the story. Their spoor showed that they had gradually moved westwards, eventually taking them out of our concession and into the Kruger National Park.
- Following their departure, lionesses became something of a rarity. Our only sightings of lionesses were in the company of the Karingani males, as the pairings continued through the month. The three brothers are particularly recognisable to us, with one of the males fitted with a tracking collar as part of ongoing research and conservation efforts. These males have come across from Mozambique, where vehicle densities are considerably lower, and they are still becoming accustomed to safari vehicles. This makes their behaviour particularly interesting to watch.
- One morning, the collared male gave us a particularly memorable display. He sat low in the grass, watching the vehicle closely, his tail flicking rapidly from side to side. Suddenly, he charged towards us with a deep, impressive growl. For a moment, it looked as though he might continue his approach, but he turned away at around ten metres and settled down behind the Mananga lioness. His expression and body language seemed almost puzzled by the strange interaction, as though he simply could not understand why this unfamiliar vehicle was behaving so differently from the ones he was accustomed to in Mozambique. Encounters like these are a wonderful reminder that, while we may become familiar with individual animals and their personalities, they are still wild animals navigating an environment that is constantly changing around them.
- As the month drew to an end, the larger portion of the Mananga Pride—all eight members—strolled into our concession with the roundest, most distended bellies I have ever seen. They had clearly been successful in finding a meal large enough to sustain the entire pride, allowing them to simply lie around for nearly 36 hours without moving more than 50 metres. By the following morning, they had disappeared. The day after that, we found signs that they had killed and fed on a large zebra, which explained their now once again full bellies.

Leopards

- It was early afternoon when one of our expert trackers noticed a distinct drag mark crossing the sandy path, accompanied by the unmistakable tracks of a leopard. Following the trail, we soon spotted movement high in a tall false-marula tree at the base of the granophyre, where we discovered the elusive N'wanetsi female — and, to our delight, her young male cub. She was feeding on an impala, while her youngster lay draped over a horizontal branch, his full belly hanging comfortably to one side. Below, a patient hyena watched from the ground, and we suspect it may have managed to scavenge a portion of the impala before she hauled the carcass into the safety of the tree. The N'wanetsi female is a particularly beautiful leopard, with striking grass-green eyes, but her shy nature and preference for the rugged granophyre habitat mean that sightings of her are few and far between. Her young son, however, was remarkably relaxed, allowing us a wonderful glimpse into his early life, and we hope this confident little male continues to thrive and becomes a familiar face in the months and years ahead.
- The highlight this month came from a sighting barely 500 metres from the lodges. It began as we rounded the first bend, with more than twenty impala sprinting and leaping towards our vehicle. Something was clearly chasing them. A few seconds later, a pair of African wild dogs appeared in hot pursuit. The way the

impala had scattered had left the dogs unsuccessful, or so we thought. Their chase had led one of the dogs onto the Access Road, where it came across the Dumbana female leopard and her cub feeding on a young male bushbuck. The dog chased her into a tree and began feeding on the carcass. After a few minutes, the wild dog moved off, allowing Dumbana to climb down. She dragged the carcass a few metres beneath a different tree, and her cub quickly rushed back to join her. The pair began feeding frantically. Their meal was short-lived, however, as the wild dog pack returned within minutes, this time with pups in tow, and finished off most of the carcass. With all the commotion, a single spotted hyena was attracted to the scene. Being outnumbered, she hung back, but after a few minutes, another four spotted hyenas arrived. Together, they chased the wild dogs off and stole what remained of the carcass for themselves.

Cheetahs

- A coalition of three male cheetahs appeared in the central depression before moving into the recently burnt areas where the prolific game provides endless hunting opportunities.

African wild dogs

- The long-awaited moment finally arrived, the wild dog puppies are out of the den! After weeks of knowing that a litter was tucked away in a rocky outcrop, we have finally been treated to glimpses of the newest members of the pack. The pups have been seen on several occasions this month, increasingly venturing out alongside the adults, and our most recent count came to five little personalities.
- Seeing young wild dogs at this stage is particularly special. The first few months of life are an incredibly vulnerable time, and infant mortality among wild dog pups can be high. Their survival is influenced by several factors, including predation from lions, hyenas and other predators, disease, competition within the wider ecosystem, and the availability of food for the pack. The pups are also entirely dependent on the adults in these early months, who must provide both protection and food while balancing the needs of the den and the rest of the pack. With this in mind, every sighting of healthy, playful pups feels like a small victory and a privilege to witness.

Elephants

- This month has brought some of the most extraordinary elephant sightings I've experienced in my time at Singita, a feeling echoed by several other guides. Whether it is simply coincidence or a result of the effects of the drought, elephants seem to be absolutely everywhere. From tiny calves cautiously hiding behind their mothers to more confident toddlers pushing and shoving their way through the herd, there has been a wonderful variety of ages and personalities on display. Large bulls in musth have also been a regular presence, following breeding herds and leaving their unmistakable, potent scent dribbling along the roads. Around the remaining water points, several herds have often congregated together, creating impressive gatherings and some truly memorable elephant encounters.

Spotted hyenas

- With the lion dynamics remaining unpredictable, spotted hyenas have been quick to take advantage, turning up at almost every carcass. Whether waiting beneath a tree for scraps to fall, lingering on the outskirts of a lion kill, or following the tracks of leopards, they are never far away sniffing the air, tracking opportunities, and calling for backup.
- One particularly amusing sighting involved a young hyena beneath a weeping boer bean, where Dumbana and her cub were fast asleep on a thick branch, with a half-eaten bushbuck stashed safely above them. The hyena sniffed his way to the base of the tree and settled on the slope, patiently waiting for the leopards to finish their nap. At one point, he looked up and shifted his weight, only to slowly slide down the slope on the dry leaves. The look of embarrassment was priceless. Then, seemingly convinced that the carcass might be reachable, he began attempting to launch himself onto the overhanging branches. He would climb to the top of the slope, leap mouth-first towards the thin branches, miss completely, and tumble back down.

After five unsuccessful attempts, he finally seemed to accept defeat, sheepishly settling back beneath the tree to wait it out.

Buffalos

- Large herds of buffalo were seen roaming the northern parts of our concession, drawn to areas where controlled burns had taken place two months earlier. These sections were now covered in a beautiful flush of fresh, green grass, attracting not only buffalo but also good numbers of zebra and wildebeest.
- One particularly interesting morning, we came across a coalition of five young male lions trailing a herd of buffalo. With their bellies already full, I doubted they had any intention of actively hunting. Instead, their behaviour appeared to be driven by instinct, the natural curiosity of predators investigating potential prey and assessing any opportunities that might arise.

Plains game

- The plains game have been nothing short of spectacular this month, with literally thousands of zebra and wildebeest drawn to the fresh flush of green grass emerging across the previously burnt areas. Zebra, in particular, have been the highlight, seemingly appearing everywhere across the reserve — from the mountains and riverbanks to the open sodic sites, and even rolling contentedly in the soft sand. Their numbers and constant movement have brought an incredible sense of life to the landscape, with herds stretching across the veld and their striking, striped bodies seemingly decorating the plains wherever you look. Amongst them, the wildebeest have been just as abundant, taking full advantage of the new growth and adding to the remarkable spectacle of plains game that this month has offered.

Birds

- The red-chested flufftail has been spotted once again in the newly formed marshes in the central depression, as well as two brand-new blacksmith lapwing chicks with their disproportionately long toes.
- We watched as an African harrier-hawk flew from tree to tree, hanging on with one foot while it searched cavities for bird chicks or other meaty morsels hiding in the holes.
- With the controlled burns across the concession, the kites, Kori bustards and others have had a feast on the “smoked” insects.

Rare animals and other sightings

- One morning, a guide heard a commotion high up in a knobthorn tree, with spurfowl giving repeated alarm calls. On investigating, we discovered the reason for all the fuss, a beautiful caracal had caught an unfortunate spurfowl and was quietly feeding at the base of the tree. It was a wonderful and unexpected encounter with one of the bushveld’s more secretive predators.
- Remarkably, we had another sighting of what appeared to be the same caracal in the area. This time, the beautiful, tawny-coloured cat was almost completely concealed in the long grass, with only its distinctive tufted ears and watchful face visible as it peered towards us. After a few moments, it rose calmly from the grass and wandered off towards the mountains, disappearing as quietly as it had appeared.
- One evening, a white-tailed mongoose gave us an entertaining escort along the road, trotting ahead of the vehicle before suddenly becoming very interested in a sound from the surrounding grass. He quickly disappeared into the vegetation to investigate, leaving us wondering what had caught his attention.
- We were also fortunate enough to have two serval sightings this month, always a special encounter given their elusive nature and preference for remaining well hidden in the grasslands.
- Finally, signs of another particularly rare resident were discovered in the Central Depression, with fresh pangolin tracks seen in the sand. Although we did not see the animal itself, finding these distinctive tracks was a wonderful reminder of the secretive wildlife moving through the area under the cover of darkness.

Some Bush Stories follow, as well as the September Gallery

The wilderness is a place filled with beauty, adventure and unforgettable experiences. It is a place where every sunrise brings a new chapter and every moment has a story waiting to be told. From the powerful roar of a lion echoing across the savanna to the gentle movement of elephants making their way towards a river, the wilderness is alive with stories. In the open clearings, hundreds of impalas move with incredible energy, leaping and running through the bush, each day bringing another opportunity to survive, explore and simply make it through another morning.

For those who spend their lives here, these moments become more than just wildlife sightings. They become memories, lessons and stories shared between people and nature. As safari guides and trackers, we have the privilege of helping our guests discover these stories. We do not simply point out animals or identify tracks; we connect the pieces of the landscape to create a deeper understanding of the wilderness. Every sighting, sound, scent and footprint can reveal something about the life unfolding around us.

A set of fresh tracks in the sand might tell us that a lion passed through during the night. Broken branches may reveal the recent movement of an elephant herd, while alarm calls from birds can alert us to the presence of a predator hidden somewhere in the vegetation. Even silence can tell a story. When the bush suddenly becomes still, a guide learns to listen carefully, because the wilderness is often communicating through what cannot immediately be seen.

A leopard resting high in a marula tree, for example, becomes much more than an animal to photograph. Through storytelling, that moment can become an opportunity to understand the animal's behaviour, its relationship with the landscape and perhaps even the history of that individual leopard. We may know where it was born, the territory it has inherited, the challenges it has faced and the animals it has raised. Suddenly, the photograph becomes part of a much bigger story, a story about survival, adaptation and life in the wild.

This is where the role of the guide becomes so important. A guide's knowledge, voice and ability to read the wilderness can transform an ordinary game drive into an unforgettable experience. The landscape may look quiet and unchanged to an untrained eye, but a guide learns to notice the small details: the direction in which birds are looking, the freshness of an animal track, the movement of grass in the wind or the distant sound of alarm calls. These details allow us to interpret what is happening and share it with our guests. Storytelling allows us to bridge the gap between people and wildlife. It gives meaning to what guests see and helps them understand that every animal is part of a much larger and interconnected ecosystem. The elephant at the waterhole is not simply an elephant. It is part of a family, a herd and a landscape that has sustained generations before it. An impala running across a clearing is not simply a beautiful sight, it is a vital part of the food chain and an animal constantly balancing survival with the need to feed, reproduce and protect its young.

The wilderness is therefore much like a living storybook. Its pages are written in footprints, calls, movements, trees, rivers and seasons. Some stories are dramatic, while others are quiet and easily missed. A pride of lions resting beneath a tree, a herd of elephants disappearing into thick bush, or a small bird feeding its chicks may appear to be simple moments, but each one represents a chapter in the continuing story of life. As guides, we become the interpreters of these pages. Our responsibility is not only to find wildlife, but to help people understand it. We share knowledge, but we also share emotion. We encourage curiosity, patience and respect. Sometimes the most powerful experience is not seeing the rarest animal or witnessing the most dramatic encounter, but sitting quietly and allowing the wilderness to reveal itself in its own time. Every game drive is therefore different. The same road can tell a completely different story from one day to the next. The animals may have moved, the weather may have changed, tracks may have appeared or disappeared, and new life may have arrived. The wilderness never repeats itself exactly. Perhaps that is what makes the wild so captivating.



Photo by Mathew Sussens

For a few hours, our guests become part of this story. They leave the vehicle, the noise and the routines of everyday life behind and enter a world where survival, beauty and connection are unfolding all around them. Through our eyes as guides, they begin to see beyond the obvious and appreciate the subtle language of nature.

In the end, storytelling is not simply about entertaining our guests. It is about creating a connection between people and wildlife, between the present moment and generations of natural history, and between what we see and what it means. We are fortunate to walk these wild places, to witness their stories and to share them with others. Every track, call, sunrise and encounter adds another page. And as guides, we are privileged to be both the interpreters of nature and the narrators of the greatest storybook of all: wilderness.

Going to the dogs

Article and photo by Monika Dallas

One particularly memorable morning was spent with the adults and their youngsters as they searched for somewhere to escape the already intense heat of the morning. Wild dogs are remarkably active animals, but the African sun can quickly become oppressive, and finding a cool, sheltered resting spot is essential. Eventually, they settled beneath an area of longer grass and lush bushes, where there was just enough shade and cover to provide some relief. As the adults relaxed, the pups began to gain confidence. At first, they kept close to the pack, but curiosity soon got the better of them. One by one, they ventured towards the vehicles, approaching as a little group with their characteristic oversized ears alert and their tiny noses held high, busily taking in all the unfamiliar scents around them. For a few moments, we had the wonderful experience of watching their inquisitive faces appear between the grasses as they investigated us. Of course, their attention span was short-lived. Having decided that we were no longer particularly interesting, the youngsters turned their attention to a fallen tree nearby. What followed was a delightful display of puppy chaos, pulling at dry branches, chewing on the wood and enthusiastically testing everything they could get their teeth around. Before long, the group broke into pairs, chasing, tackling and play-biting one another as they bounded through the long grass. Their play may look like pure mischief, but these energetic games are an important part of

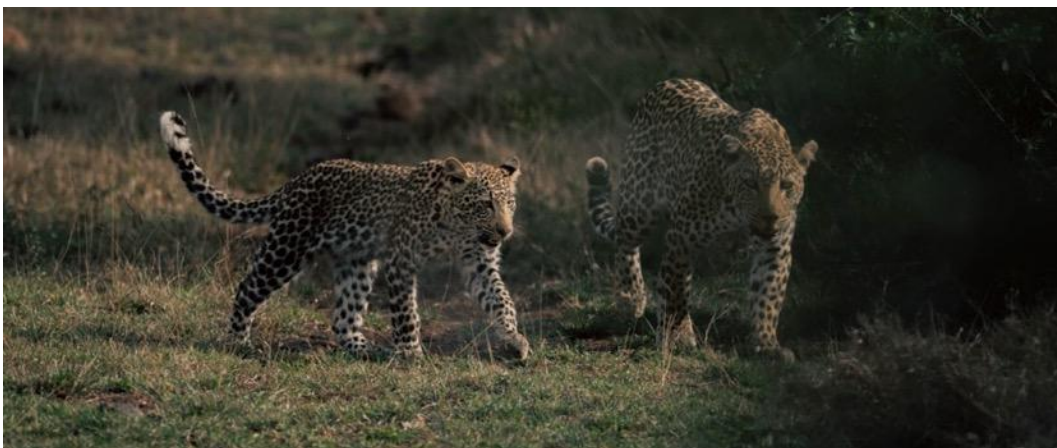


growing up. Through play, the pups develop coordination, confidence and the social skills they will eventually need as members of one of Africa's most cooperative and fascinating predators. For us, it was a reminder of why spending time with wildlife is so rewarding.

All's well that ends well

Article and photo by Monika Dallas

The first week of the month was unusually quiet for Dumbana. There were only one or two fleeting sightings of her, while her cub remained alone for more than a week on the rocky outcrops near Dumbana Pools, the area after which she was named. We had begun to worry, particularly because Dumbana rarely hoists her kills. This habit likely stems from a time when hyena numbers were much lower, and there was little pressure to protect her hard-earned meals. With a low-pressure cell moving over the concession, bringing strong winds and intermittent rain, we hoped the changing conditions would favour a successful hunt. Her cub was beginning to look hungry. After several more days, our concerns grew. Then, mid-morning, Dumbana was spotted on the H6, heading north back into our concession. She had travelled a considerable distance, yet surprisingly, she did not appear to be starving. She had most likely managed to find something small to eat. Now, however, it was time to return to her cub. The following morning, a very lucky guide found her along the river, where she had spotted a bushbuck hiding in the thicket. Startled, the bushbuck bolted towards the road, but Dumbana was too quick. She brought it down, dragged the carcass beneath a tall *Schotia*, and began feeding. That afternoon, much to our relief, we found Dumbana and her cub feeding on the young bushbuck, safely hoisted into a weeping boer bean (*Schotia brachypetala*). As expected, a single spotted hyena sat below, staring up at them with its beady black eyes.



How do you eat an elephant?

Article and photos by Monika Dallas

For the first two weeks of the month, one of our river crossings became something of a wildlife hotspot following the unfortunate death of an old bull elephant. The elephant had slipped and fallen in the river, where the water was still deep enough to provide an ideal opportunity for the crocodiles. They were the first to arrive and spent several days feeding on the carcass, with an estimated 30 or more crocodiles making use of this unexpected meal. Some impressive three-metre giants could be seen basking along the riverbanks for weeks afterwards. One morning, we discovered that the carcass had somehow shifted approximately 20 metres downstream. How this happened remains a mystery to us, but the elephant was now lying in slightly shallower water. Tracks from leopard, lion and hyena showed that several of the area's predators had come to investigate, but it seemed that the risk of entering the river, with so many opportunistic crocodiles waiting below the surface, was simply not worth it. As the heat continued, the river level dropped a little each day, gradually making the carcass more accessible. After more than a week of decomposition, a clan of spotted hyenas finally decided to brave the crocodile-infested waters and were found feeding on the carcass late one morning. Since then, they have returned daily, and within just three days, their efforts had reduced what remained of the elephant to little more than a scattering of bones — a remarkable display of nature's efficiency and the river's role in recycling even the largest of animals.





At dawn, the Lebombo ridges glow with a quiet fire, their ancient silhouettes holding stories older than any pride or herd. Here, the land itself speaks, a language of stone, soil, and water that connects every guest, every guide, and every creature that passes through. To walk these paths is to step into a living archive of human and animal history, where the earth is both stage and storyteller. Every rock, every bend in the river, every echo across the valley carries a story, one that connects us to the past, grounds us in the present, and points toward the future.

The N'wanetsi River flows through this land, restless and ever-changing, crossing borders and carrying with it the promise of adventure. Beside it stand the granophyre rocks of the Lebombo mountains, ancient structures that have held their place for nearly 180 million years. Together, they remind us of life's rhythm, water that moves and shifts, stone that endures. One speaks of possibility, the other of permanence but both essential, both connected.

Lebombo talks to you. Not in words, but in silence, in scale, in beauty. It speaks through the variety of life that depends on its structure, through the peace that settles over the land even as every creature fights for survival.

Unlike other reserves I've guided in, this place feels truly wild, untouched by the outside world. It invites you to disconnect from the noise and reconnect with what matters.

For me, being in the bush is a return to childhood, a reopening of the senses, like seeing the world for the first time. I learned early that you can never force nature, you must be part of it, take a step back, observe, listen, feel and then it flows. Guests arrive from cities with their senses overwhelmed and out of place, but here those senses awaken again, realign.

I hope the future of this land is one where change comes only through nature itself, with humans playing their part by protecting and experiencing it. That is the rhythm I want to see continue, a heartbeat that endures.

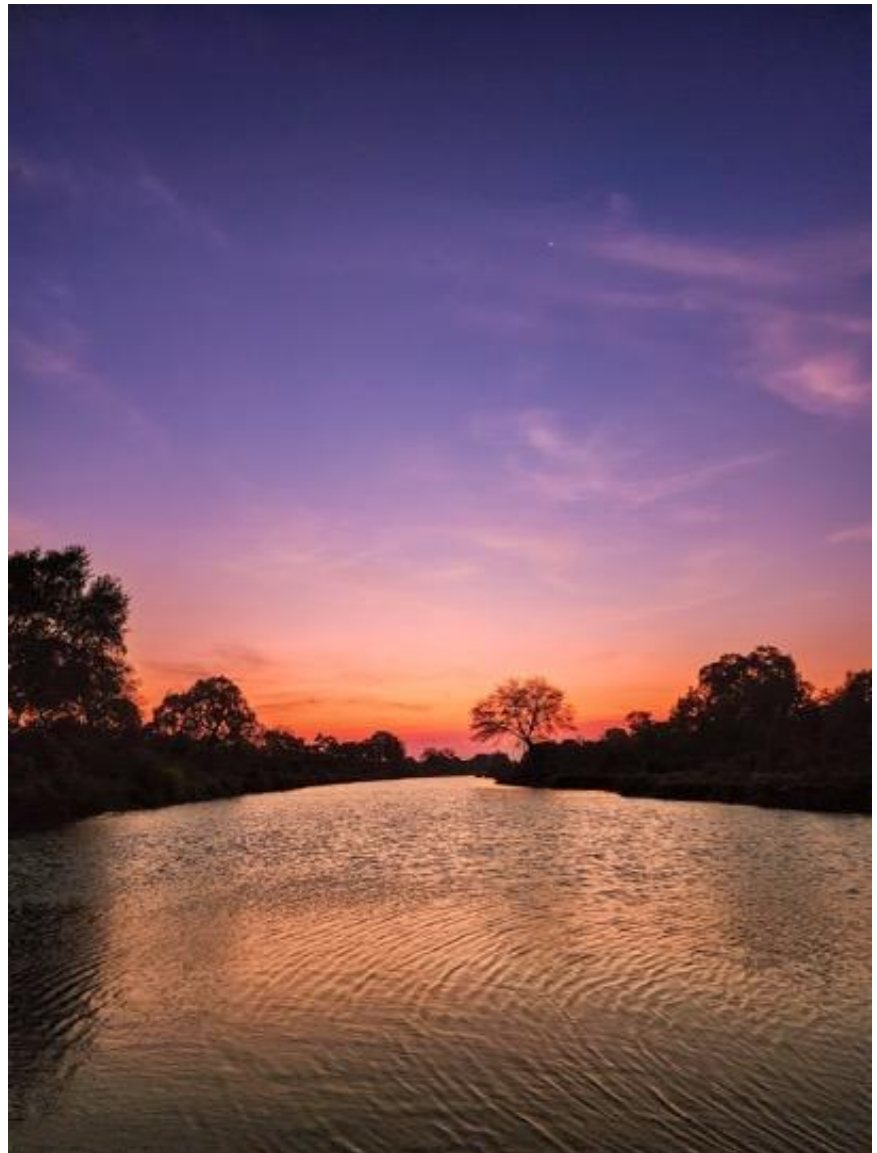
Guests often comment on the silence, the vastness, the way Lebombo feels different from anywhere else.

Drives here lose focus on ticking off the Big Five and instead become journeys of discovery. At certain lookouts, you see the Kruger stretching endlessly, no lights, no people, only peace.

One evening, I took guests to one of my favourite viewpoints. As the sun set over the river, we let out a yell and listened as our voices echoed back across the valley. In that moment, the drive became about presence, not sightings. On the way back, they told me it was one of the best memories of their lives. I was part of their journey, but it was the land itself that gave them that feeling. When I stand at those viewpoints myself, I feel peace. I feel part of something larger than myself. That's what makes me passionate about guiding, sharing nature, sharing connection.

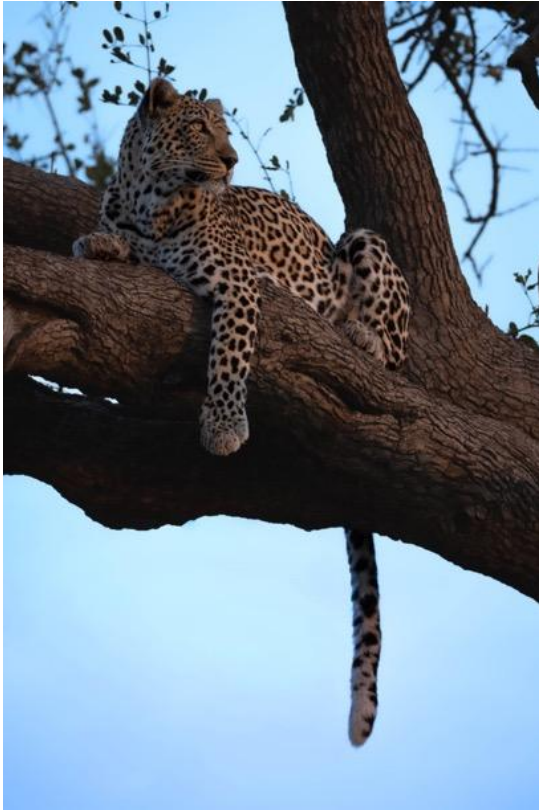
Lebombo is a heartbeat. The river flows like blood, the rocks stand like bones, the silence breathes like lungs. Its rhythm is natural, steady, eternal. To be here is to feel that rhythm within yourself, to realize you are part of the story, part of the past, present, and future of this land.

And when guests leave, I hope they carry that heartbeat with them. Not as a tick-box memory or a fleeting Instagram reel, but as a lasting connection, a reminder that they are forever part of this landscape and its story.

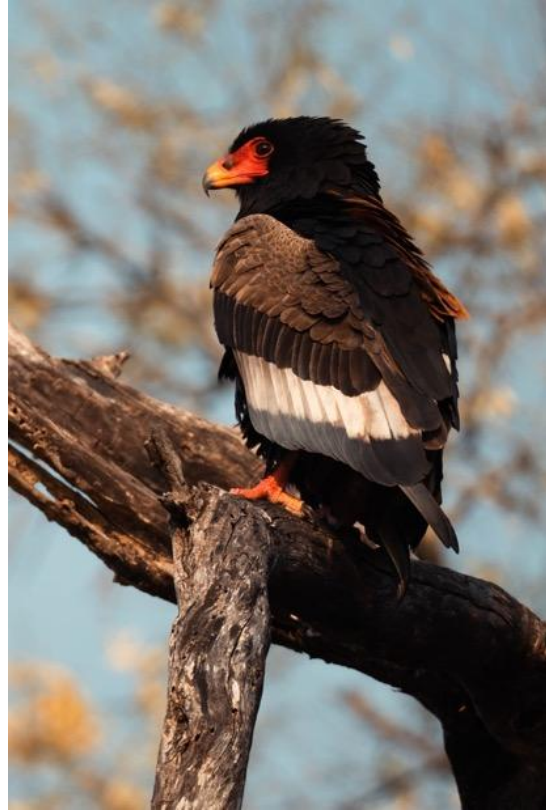


September Gallery

All photos by Monika Dallas



Dumbana female



Bateleur eagle

Waterbuck



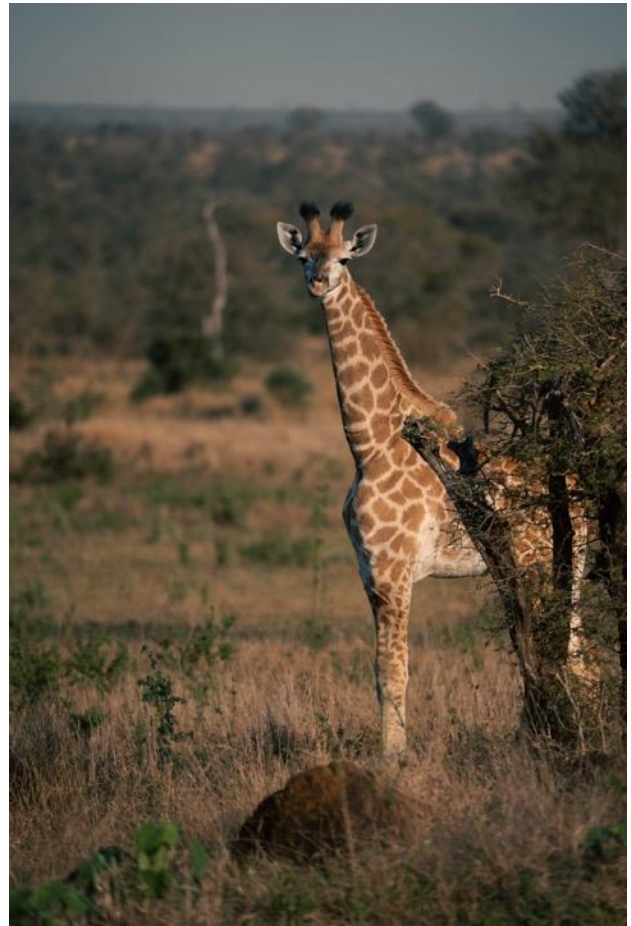


Elephant bull

Blacksmith lapwing chick



Giraffe calf





Little Heron

Hippopotamus





Verreaux's Eagle-owl

Karingani male with Mananga lioness





Kudu cow

Elephant bull

